# LEGENDS

AMY LOWELL

In appreciation of
Mrs W. D. Henderson -

Books by AMY LOWELL

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## *Poetry*

WHAT'S O'CLOCK

LEGENDS

PICTURES OF THE FLOATING WORLD

CAN GRANDE'S CASTLE

MEN, WOMEN AND GHOSTS

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SIX FRENCH POETS: STUDIES IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

JOHN KEATS

# LEGENDS

BY

AMY LOWELL



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# PREFACE

A LEGEND is something which nobody has written and everybody has written, and which anybody is at liberty to rewrite. It may be altered, it may be viewed from any angle, it may assume what dress the author pleases, yet it remains essentially the same because it is attached to the very fibres of the heart of man. Civilization is the study of man about himself, his powers, limitations, and endurances; it is the slowly acquired knowledge of how he can best exist in company with his fellows on the planet called Earth. As man learns, he becomes conscious, first of an immense curiosity, and then of a measure of understanding, and, immediately after, of a desire to express both; and the simplest form of expression is by means of the tale or (hateful word!) allegory. Hence legends; they

are bits of fact, or guesses at fact, pressed into the form of a story and flung out into the world as markers of how much ground has been travelled. If science be proven truth (and I believe it is), legends might be described as speculative or apprehended truth. When legends deal with natural phenomena, they may be — in fact, in the end, always are — superseded by science, but they retain the same charm for races which fairy-stories have for individuals, we love them because we once loved them. When they deal with humanity, they are extremely apt to strike us as sharply as they did our forbears. Man is a strangely alike animal, as the prevalence of certain legends among a wide variety of peoples abundantly proves.

This book, then, is a book of legends. The stories in it are neither new, nor old; they are perennial, this is my version, as the next man will have his and so on forever. Some I have left more or less in the settings in which I found them,

to others I have given a new environment, some I have never either read or heard, they come out of an atavistic memory, I suppose. Stories, as such, they emphatically are not, since all have that curious substratum of reality, speculative or apprehended, of which I have spoken. But searchers for exact folk-lore need not look to me, there is nothing exact to be found here. I have changed, added, subtracted, jumbled several together at will, left out portions; in short, made them over to suit my particular vision. A poet is the most contradictory creature imaginable, he respects nothing and reveres everything, but what he loves he makes his own. And this then is just the touchstone of the true legend, it can be made over in any image, but always remains itself.

As for the original impulse, in some cases I have forgotten it, in others I do not know what it was. For instance, I remember that "A Legend of Porcelain" was composed of three

distinct legends, but I do not know where I found them, probably in Dr. Stephen W. Bushell's "Description of Chinese Pottery and Porcelain" or in the "Histoire et Fabrication de la Porcelaine Chinoise" by M. Stanislas Julien, the volume which gave Lafcadio Hearn the material of his "Tale of the Porcelain God." Both these books consist principally of translations of Chinese treatises, Julien's of the "King-te-tchin T'ao Lu," or "History of the King-te-tchin Porcelains," the original work was published in 1815; Bushell's of the "T'ao Shuo" or "Description of Pottery," by Chu Yen, an eighteenth century official, who held an appointment under the jurisdiction of the Governor of the Province of Kiangsi. King-te-tchin, the city in which the Imperial porcelain factories were situated, was in this province, and Chu Yen made a personal investigation of the processes of the manufacture of porcelain during his residence there. His book was published in 1774. It is a

most fascinating volume, and as English lends itself more easily to the translation of Chinese than does French, the account of the various kinds of porcelain and its trade names as rendered by Dr. Bushell keeps the poetic flavour of the originals better than the same descriptions in M. Julien's work. Chu Yen invokes the aid of both poets and philosophers to make his book vivid and readable. One proverb which he mentions is so pertinent to this preface that I cannot resist quoting it, as a warning and as a delight: "Those who plant the polygonium in rows, put ornamental borders on earthenware bowls and dishes, weigh the firewood before burning it, and count the grains of rice before cooking it, are fit only to attend to petty things, not to have the management of large affairs." Mindful then of this most wise saying, I will not enumerate other books on China which I have read. Indeed, I could not, they are so many.

"Confided by a Yucca to a Passion-Vine"

sprang from a sentence embedded somewhere in Garcilasso de la Vega's account of his ancestors, the Incas, the version which appeared in the 1625 edition of "Purchas His Pilgrims."

"Many Swans" is based on a Kathlemet text translated by Dr. Franz Boas, the original of which may be found in one of the Bulletins of the Bureau of Archæology and Ethnology of the Smithsonian Institution. The main theme and many of the episodes of this legend I have retained, while at the same time augmenting and freely departing from it in order to gain a wider symbolism. The incident of the ladder of arrows appears in many Indian stories, notably in a Tlingit myth recorded by Mr. John Reed Swanton, published in another bulletin of the same bureau. Four of the songs in the poem are real Indian songs, or parts of them, the words of which are quoted in a paper, "The Kwakiutl Indians," by Dr. Boas in a Report of the United States National Museum; another is an adapta-

tion of a free translation made many years ago by Dr. Washington Matthews. The rest of the songs are merely in the Indian idiom. In the interest of atmospheric truth, I have felt at liberty to make occasional use of Indian expressions and turns of thought, and I here wish to express my gratitude to that small body of indefatigable workers (and especially to Dr. Franz Boas, Miss Frances Densmore, and Mr. John Reed Swanton) in the field of Indian folk-lore and tradition, whose careful and exact translations of Indian texts have made them accessible to those who, like myself, have not the Indian tongues. I feel also the liveliest sense of obligation to Mr. George Bird Grinnell, whose history of Indian wars taken down from the mouths of the chiefs who participated in them, "The Fighting Cheyennes," gave me my first insight into Indian psychology. Two slight incidents in my poem are from these historical records.

To the great army of Indian travellers, from

the trappers and explorers of the early years to our contemporaries, I am deeply indebted, since they have made Indians and the Indian country not only real to me, but familiar. The "Funeral Song for the Indian Chief Blackbird" I owe to a legend, or rather fact, recorded in Catlin's "North American Indians." I say "fact" advisedly, for Catlin says that he looked into a gopher hole in the burial mound and distinctly saw the bones of the horse's skull. Among students of Indian lore, I must not omit to mention Mr. J. Walter Fewkes, whose papers on the Hopi Indians, and whose account of the Snake Dance particularly, have been invaluable.

The inspiration for "The Ring and the Castle" is lost irrevocably, I have no idea from what it arose, and the same is true of "Gavotte in D Minor."

The theme of "Dried Marjoram" has been a favourite one with poets since time was. I stumbled across it in a history, or guide-book, of

Hampshire County, England, but I need have gone no farther than the Bible and the story of Rizpah.

"The Statue in the Garden" is another old tale, which goes back to the later Romans and probably beyond. My initial introduction to it came from Burton's "Anatomy of Melancholy."

"Before the Storm" was an abiding fear of my childhood. How often have I driven through the hush which precedes a thunderstorm, all of a tremble lest I should meet the old man and his child in the yellow-wheeled chaise. Yet I believe that the legend was in this case the product of a single brain, that of the now almost forgotten writer, William Austin, who published a tale on the subject in 1824. A true legend it was to me, however, long before I knew its origin, and as such I have treated it, with the result that my version is quite unlike Mr. Austin's.

"Four Sides to a House" refers to a superstition common to many countries. Its existence

in New England is not so well known, but there is evidence to prove it.

I sincerely hope that these Tales of Peoples which I have loved and written down may interest others as much as they have me. Indeed, how can it be otherwise, since they are Legends, with a long past and, I believe, a longer future at the hands of coming generations. That inaccuracies from the point of view of the student of folk-lore have crept into the poems, I have no doubt, nor does it make any difference to me. The truth of poetry is imaginative, not literal, and it is as a poet that I have conceived and written my book.

AMY LOWELL

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# LEGENDS

## MEMORANDUM CONFIDED BY A YUCCA TO A PASSION-VINE

The Turkey-buzzard was chatting with the Condor
High up in the White Cordillera.
"Surely our friend the fox is mad," said he.
"He chases birds no more and his tail trails languidly
Behind him in the dust.
Why, he got it full of cactus-spines one day,
Pawing over a plant that stood in his way.
All the bees are buzzing about it.
Consider a fox who passes by the great hives of sharp,
black honey
And looks at them no more than a heron would."
"Odd," said the Condor. "Remarkably peculiar."
And he flapped his wings and flew away to the
porcelain peaks of the distant Sierra.

So the Turkey-buzzard thought no more of the matter,
But busied himself with the carcass of a dead llama.

And the sun boomed onward over the ice-peaks:
Hot — Hot — Hotter!
And the sun dropped behind the snow-peaks,
And the cool of shadow was so delicious that all the
squirrels and rabbits and peccaries and lizards
Flirted their tails;
And the flamingoes in Lake Titicaca puffed out their
gizzards,
And waded into the pink water reflected from the
carmine-tinted mountain summits;
And the parrots chattered and flashed in the mimosas;
And the eagles dove like plummets
Upon the unfortunate alpacas.
The animals were enjoying themselves in the rose-red
light that lingers
Flung from the blood-orchid tips of the mountains

Before the night mists slide over the foothills.
Ah! But you could see them in the valleys,
Floating and circling like dead men's fingers
Combing living hair.

In a place of bright quartz rocks,
Sits a small red fox.
He is half in the shade of a cactus-bush.
The birds still fly, but there is a hush
And a sifting of purple through the air:
Blue dims rose,
The evening is fair.
Why is the red fox waiting there,
With his sniffing nose,
And his stiffened pose,
And his narrow eyelids which never close?
"Fox — fox —
Against the rocks.
Are you rooted there till the equinox?"

So the alcamarines flocking home in the afterglow
Mock the poor fox, but he does n't seem to know.
He sits on his haunches, staring high
Into the soft, fruit-green evening sky.

A yellow rose blooms in the glow,
Thin fox frosted by silver snow,
Mica-crystals flecking over indigo.
And a cactus-tree
Grating its thorn-leaves huskily.
Moan of wind and the crackles of an empty place
At the coming of night.
The fox is alone.
Then in the far green heavens the lady rises, tall and
white.
August and dazzling
In the drooping light,
She shimmers, jubilantly bright.
Breasts and thighs tuned to liquid air,

Loveliness set naked in a firmament.

He sees the slim, smooth arms,

And the virgin waist bending with delicate movement.

Her body sways as a flower stem

Caught in a gust;

And her hair is thrust

Towards him, he can see the gem

Which binds it loosely. His eyes are greedy

Of the curving undulations and straight fall

Following down from head to foot, and all

Cool and unclouded, touching him almost.

With hot tongue he pants upon the splendour

Of this marble beauty, imperious and unashamed

In her extreme of excellence.

Then he weeps,

Weeps in little yelping barks for the cold beautiful

body

Of the inaccessible moon.

The villagers wake in a startled fright

And tell each other: "A fox bays the moon to-night."

The moon lives in Cuzco —
It was the Partridge who told him so —
In a temple builded of jointured stone
On an emerald-studded, silver throne.
So the fox set out for Cuzco with his tail held high to
keep it out of the dust.

Tramp! Tramp! Tramp!
What is that noise approaching him?
Quick, behind a stone,
And he watches them come,
The soldiers of the great Inca.
Copper spear-heads running like a river of gold along
the road.
Helmets of tiger-skins, coats of glittering feathers,
A ripple of colours from one edge of the way to the other.
Feet of men cadenced to the swing of weapons.

So many bows, and arrows, and slings, and darts, and
lances,
A twinkling rhythm of reflections to which the army
advances,
And a rainbow banner flickering colours to the slipping
of the wind.
They pass as water passes and the fox is left behind.
"Those men come from Cuzco," thought the fox,
And his heart was like lead in his stomach for wonder-
ing if they knew the moon.
Then he trotted on again with his tail held high to
keep it out of the dust.

Pat! Pat! Pat!
What is that sound behind him?
He leaps into a bush of tufted acacia just in time.
It is a post-runner, doing his stint of five miles,
Carrying merchandise from the coast.
And the fox's mouth waters as he smells fish:

Bobos, shads, sardines,
All fading in a little osier basket,
Faint colours whispering the hues of the rainbow flag.
But the runner must not lag,
These fish are for the Inca's table.
A flash of feet against the heart-shaped flowers of the
yolosuchil
And the jarred leaves settle and are still.
The fox creeps out and resumes his journey, with his
tail held high to keep it out of the dust.

Over bush and bramble and prick and thorn
Goes the fox, till his feet are torn,
And his eyes are weary with keeping the trail
Through ashen wind and clattering hail,
With the hot, round sun lying flat on his head,
And morning crushing its weight of lead
On scores of trumpet-vines tangled and dead.
Across swung bridges of plaited reeds

In a whorl of foaming, bursting beads
Of river mist, where a cañon makes a fall
Of thousands of feet in a sheer rock wall.
Pomegranates toss him scarlet petals,
The little covetous claws of nettles
Catch at his fur, and a sudden gloom
Blocks his path on a drip of bloom.
Over prick and thorn and bush and bramble;
Up pointed boulders with a slip and scramble,
Past geese with flattened, blue-green wings
Pulling the ichu grass which springs
In narrow fissures where nothing else clings;
Through terraced fields of bright-tongued maize
Licking the hills to a golden blaze;
Under clustered bananas and scented oaks;
Across dry, high plains where the yucca chokes.
Dawns explode in bleeding lights
On the snow-still uplands of ghastly heights
Where long-dead bodies stare through their hair

Crooking their brittle legs and bare
Ice-tortured arms, and the sun at noon
Is a glassy shell of dull maroon.
Only at night he watches the moon
Stepping along the smooth, pale sky
In a silver florescence. By and by
The red fox reaches the gates of Cuzco,
But his tail is very much bedraggled for he can no
longer hold it up out of the dust.

Morning playing dimly in the passion-vines
Hanging over the gates of Cuzco.
Morning picking out a purple flower —
Another — another —
Cascading down the walls of Cuzco.
Scarlet-flashing, uprose the sun
With one deep bell-note of a copper-crashed gong.
Glory of rose-mist over the Sierra,
Glory of crimson on the tinted turrets

Of the wide old fort under the high cliff.

Glory of vermilion dripping from the windows,

Glory of saffron streaking all the shadows,

House fronts glaring in fresh young light,

Gold over Cuzco!

Gold!

Gold!

In an orchid flow,

Where the Temple of Pachacamac rose like a bell

Shining on the city,

With the clear sweet swell of an open sunrise gong.

White and carnation,

White and carnation,

The sun's great gnomon,

Measuring its shadow on the long sharp gold polished

grass.

Who pass here

In an early year?

Lightning and Thunder,

Servants of the Sun.

Lord of the rainbow's white and purple,

Blue and carnation,

All awhirl to a curl of gold.

He who comes from the land of monkeys,

He who comes from the flying-fishes playing games
with rainbow dolphins,

Pause —

Here before the gates of gold.

Chamfered crown about the Temple,

Sparkling points and twisted spirals,

All of Gold.

Lemon-tinted Gold,

Red-washed fire Gold,

Gold, the planking,

Gold, the roof-tree,

Gold the burnished doors and porches,

And the chairs of the dead Incas·

One long row of stately bodies

Sitting dead in all the dazzle
Glittering with bright green emeralds.
White-haired Incas,
Hoary Incas,
Black and shiny-haired young Incas,
All dead Incas;
With their hands crossed on their breasts
And their eyes cast down, they wait there.
Terrible and full-fleshed Incas.
Blaze of fire, burning, glaring,
Bright, too bright!
Ah-h-h!
The Sun!
Up through the wide-open Eastern portal,
Broken, sharpened on a thousand plates of gold,
It falls,
Splintered into prisms on the rainbow walls.
The Sun steps into his house.
Hush! It is the PRESENCE!

Face of Pachacamac,

Wreathed in burnished flames of swift fire.

Then on the wind of a thousand voices rises the hymn:

"Pachacamac

World's Creator,

Mountain-mover,

Heaven-dwelling.

We beseech thee

Send thy showers,

Warm our meadows,

Bless the seed-ears.

Man and woman,

Beast and lizard,

Feathered people,

Whales and fishes,

All implore thee,

Clement God-head,

To make fruitful

These thy creatures.

String their sinews
Ripe for power,
Quicken wombs and
Eggs and rootlets.
Be the Father,
The Begetter.
Pour upon us,
Lord of all things,
Of thy bounty,
Of thy fulness.
So we praise thee,
Swelling Apple,
Gourd of Promise,
Mighty Melon,
Seed-encaser,
Sun and Spirit,
Lord of Morning,
Blood of Mercy,
Pachacamac!"

And the great tide of men's voices echoed and curved
upon the plates of gold
Lining the Temple
So that it became a wide horn of melody,
And out of it burst the hymn like a red-streaked lily
thundering to the morning.
Men's voices singing the hymn of ripening seed,
Men's voices raised in a phallic chorus to the rising
sun . . .
Virgin of the Sun,
Pale Virgin,
Through the twisting vine-leaves it comes to you
broken and shivering.
What are you, Virgin?
And who is this all-wise God
That shuts you in a hall of stone?
Cleft asunder,
A white pomegranate with no seeds,

A peascod dropped on a foot-path before its peas are
blown.
Pale Virgin, go about your baking,
For the shadows shorten and at noon the oven will be
heated.

Tired little fox outside the fence,
Lie down in the shade of the wall,
For indeed the sun has done you an injury.

Now the East wind, called Brisa, blew against the
clouds;
And the sun rushed up the sky;
And at noon the shadow of the great gnomon was not,
No single dark patch lay anywhere about its foot,
For the God sat with all his light upon the column.
The fox awoke, and sought shelter from the heat.
Creeping, he came to a garden of five fountains,
Set in green plots, and plots of silver.

For there he saw, mixed, the fruits of the sun:

Apples, quinces, loquats, and chirimoyas,

All just after flowering with their fruit-balls perfectly formed but each smaller than a pepper-grain,

And the fruits of man:

Oranges, melons, cocoanuts and breadfruit,

Fashioned of gold and silver,

Amazing with brightness.

Indian corn sprouted from the earth on thin stalks of gold

Which rattled against one another with a sweet clashing,

The golden ears escaping smartly out of broad recurved leaves of silver,

And silver tassels floated in a twinkle of whiteness from their glittering tops.

Golden snails clung to silver palm-branches,

Turquoise butterflies flew hither and thither

And one alone remained poised; it was of polished
stone.
The fox gaped for wonder and his tail lay prone on a
silver lizard;
But this he never noticed.
Then across the sounds of leaves blowing
And metals tapping,
Came music;
A voice singing in a minor key,
Throaty and uncertain as a new-cut reed.
"Mama Quilla," it sang.
"Mother Moon,
Through the shell of heaven gliding.
Moon of many stars and brothers,
Mistress of the bright-haired rainbow,
Wife and sister of the Sun-god,
Virgin moon who bore him children,
If you die then do we perish.
Mama Quilla,

I, a Virgin,

Crave a blessing,

Ask a guerdon.

O glorious, chaste, and immaculate moon,

Preserve me to my vows.

But, I implore thee,

Take from me, therefore, this my longing,

Let the Spring deal with me gently,

Still my spirit.

Or, devout and pitying mother,

Give me thunder,

Give me lightning,

Break me on a green-stone anvil,

So the flower of my body

Blow to loveliness a moment.

I am past my holding, Mama Quilla,

In the night I smell the strong-scented blossoms of the

daturas,

And my heart snares me in its loneliness."

So the fox crept up to the door where the Virgin of
the Sun sat spinning.
"Can you tell me, Lady," said he, making a fine
bow,
"If the moon lives here in Cuzco?"
Then the Virgin was afraid,
For she did not know that foxes spoke.
"Who are you," she demanded,
"And whence do you come?"
"I am a fox of the Western Country,
And I come from the water-passage of Lake Titicaca.
I love the moon,
I desire her more than the monkeys of the Eastern
forests
Desire dates,
More than your kinsmen, the Incas,
Desire the land of the Machigangas.
She is more beautiful to me than red pepper-pods

To the shepherds who walk the mountains with their
llamas.
I prize her more greatly than do the Aquarimas the
shrunken skulls of their enemies.
She is a poison-tree of many branches:
With one, she brushes the waves of the ocean
So that all the shores are overflown with the sea at
Spring tides;
And, with another, she tickles the nose of a tapir
Asleep in a grove of vanilla-trees
On the banks of the Amazon;
And I have been blinded by the sweeping of a third
Above the snow-cornice on Mount Vilcanota.
Oh, she has many branches
All dripping with silver-white poison,
And I have come here to drink this poison and
die."
"But you cannot possess the moon;
It is sacrilege," cried the Virgin,

And her hands trembled so that the distaff fell to the
ground.
"And it is sacrilege for a Virgin of the Sun to sing of
the labours of women;" said the fox.
Then the fox told of his watching, night and night,
under the cactus-bush,
Of his great pains and hungering,
And the Virgin listened in a tiptoe of attention,
While the ruby humming-birds splashed fire across the
silver ripple of the garden,
And the fountains sprang and recoiled,
And the Sun sank behind the mountains of the sea.

Hush!
Hush!
In the House of Acllahua.
The Mamacunas sleep,
The Virgins lie enmeshed in sleep.
Sleep folded on the House of Acllahua,

While the Sun, their master,
Dries the ocean with his swimming.
West to East, all night he swims,
And they in the House of Acllahua sleep.
Only she is waiting, fearing;
Now more gently, gently, gliding,
Through the fluttering silver flowers.
And the fox is waiting,
Sitting under a tamarisk-tree
With his hot tongue hanging out of his mouth.
Through the thin cloud of tamarisk-leaves
Falls a tempered moonlight,
A feathered, partial moonlight,
A moonlight growing every moment stronger,
A shadow growing every minute blacker.
The Virgin and the fox under the black feathers of the
    tamarisk-tree,
While the moon walks with a stately slowness
Down the long, quiet terraces of the sky.

Hush!

Hush!

The garden burns with cold, green fire,

A bat spots black on a gold sweet-briar,

A polished rose on a stem of wire

Sweeps and bends, a blue flung ball

Palpitating,

Undulating,

All the trees and plants girating,

All the metals quivering to song

And the great palmettos beating gongs.

The low, slow notes of the water-reeds

Underscore the glass-sweet beads

Of the little clapping melon seeds.

Gold and silver strings of a lyre

Plucked by the wind, high pitched and higher,

And the silver moans with a tone of its own

Fragile as an ixia newly blown.

All the garden sways to a noise

Of humming metal in equipoise.

Stately dates sweep a merry-go-round,

The fountains spring in a sparkle of sound.

The moonlight falls in a heap on the ground.

And there is Light!

Light in a crowned effulgence

Thrown up from the flowers and trees,

Delicate, pearled light, barred by beautiful shadows,

Bloomed light, plunging upon the silver-roofed Temple.

Open, Open,

Door of the Temple of the Moon.

Come forth, dead mothers of dead Incas.

Slow procession of the dead

Filing out of the Temple.

Mama Vello, mother of Huayna Capac,

Mama Runtu,

Mama Ocllo.

Feathered mantles brush the golden gravel,

Their hands are crossed on their breasts,

They are powdered with turquoises and raw-cut
emeralds.
Slowly the Inca mothers form a ring,
They hold a golden chain
Long and broad as the great street of Cuzco.
Slowly they move in a circle,
Chanting.
Their steps are soft as weeping water.
Their voices are faint as snow dropping through
Autumn dusk.
Suddenly, in the midst of the ring, a great fall of Light.
It is she — the MOON!
White mist circumvolves about her,
On her head is a diadem of opal-changing ice,
And hoar-frost follows the stepping of her feet.
A single emerald, half white, half foaming green,
Clasps a girdle about her waist.
Terribly she dances in the ring of Inca mothers.
The garden turns with them as they move,

Winding and closing about them,

Impelling them toward the Temple,

Up to the Altar.

Trumpets, brazen and vainglorious,

Silver-striking, shouting cymbals,

Open horns, round gourd-drums beaten to a rattle of flame.

Movement, ghostly, perpetual,

And sound, loud, sweet, sucking from the four edges of the sky.

Everything swings, and sings, and oscillates, and curves.

Only the moon upon the High Altar is still.

She stands, struck to immobility,

Then, without haste, unclasps the foaming emerald

And the mists part and fall . . .

Silence —

Silence spread beneath her as a footstool.

The flowers close;

The Inca mothers are dead corpses on their silver
thrones.

But She!

Naked, white, and beautiful,

Poised and infinite;

Flesh,

Spirit,

Woman and Unparalleled Enchantment.

Moon of waters,

Womb of peoples,

Majesty and highest Queen.

So the Goddess burns in a halo of white-rose fire

For an instant . . .

Yelp! Yelp! Yelp!

The fox has burst from the Virgin's grasp.

Over the garden,

Up the aisle of the Temple,

With staring eyes

And ghoulish, licking tongue.

Satyr fox assaulting the moon!

THUNDER!!!

Lightning serpents

Wound in great circles above the Temple.

Sheets of lightning snarling from racing, purple clouds

And rain roaring down the hot walls of a copper sky.

The clouds splinter, and a ruined moon wavers up into the heavens, about her are three great rings, one of blood, one of black, and the utmost all of stinging, glutinous, intorting coils of smoke.

Upon the disk of the moon are spots, black obscene spots, the print of a fox's paws.

* * *

Bake your cakes of the sacred maize, Virgin,

Tend the flame the priest has gathered with his metal sun-glass,

Weave feathered mantles for the Coya,

Burn holy gums to deaden the scent of the daturas.

If you and the moon have a secret,

Let it rest there.

## A LEGEND OF PORCELAIN

Old China sits and broods behind her ten-thousand-
miles-great wall,
And the rivers of old China crawl — crawl — forever
Toward the distant, ceaselessly waiting seas.

At King-te-chin in China,
At King-te-chin in the far East of the Eighteen Provinces of China,
Where all day long the porcelain factories belch corded smoke,
And all night long the watch-men, striking the hours on their lizard-skin drums,
Follow the shadows thrown before them
From a sky glazed scarlet as it floats over the fires of burning kilns —

At King-te-chin, in the heart of brooding China,
Lives Chou-Kiou,
White as milk in a tazza cup,
Red as a pear-tree just dropping its petals,
Happy as the Spring-faced wind.
Chou-Kiou,
For whom the wild geese break their flight,
And the fishes seek the darkness of the lower waters.
Chou-Kiou,
Apt as a son,
Loved as a son,
More precious to her father than blue earth with stars
of silver.
It is Chou-Kiou who paints the fighting crickets
On the egg-shell cups;
Who covers the Wa-wa cups
With little bully boys;
Who sketches Manchu ladies, Tartar ladies,

Chasing crimson butterflies with faint silk fans,
On the slim teapots of young bamboo.
Chou-Kiou,
Bustling all day between the kilns and the warehouses.
A breath of peach-bloom silk
Turning a pathway —
Puff! She is gone,
As a peach-blossom painted on paper
Caught in a corner of the wind.

King-te-chin in the Province of Kiangsi,
Noblest of the manufactories of porcelain,
Where, from sunrise to sundown,
In the narrow streets,
The porters cry "Way! Way!" for the beautiful dishes
They carry to the barges,
The flat barges which nuzzle and nudge the banks of the river Jao T'cheou;

And the strong stevedore coolies grunt
As they lift the clay bricks quarried in the P'ing-li mountains
Out of the sharp-prowed boats moored along the river Ki-muen.
Mêng Tsung, master of a thousand workmen,
Walks under the red eaves of his buildings
In the tea-green shadow of the willow-trees,
Contemplating his bakers, his mixers, his painters,
The men who carry tcha wood,
And those, nicer-fingered, who turn the shaping wheels.
He walks among the beehive furnaces,
And his nostrils smart with the sharp scent of ashes,
And his ears rattle with the crackle of a hundred flames.
Mêng Tsung, finest of the porcelain-makers of King-te-chin.

In China,

Old China,

What other artists do is his work also;

Does Lu Tzŭ Kang work in jade; the porcelains of
Mêng Tsung are ice and rainbows.

What Chu Pi-shan can do in silver,

What Hsiao-hsi in carnelian,

Pao T'ien-ch'êng in rhinoceros horn,

P'u Chung-ch'ien in carved bamboo,

Chang Ch'ien-li in mother-of-pearl,

All this is nothing.

The bowls of Mêng Tsung are like Spring sun on a
rippled river,

Like willow-leaves seen over late ice,

Like bronze bells one hour before sunset.

They are light as the eggs of the yellow-eyebrowed
thrush,

And wonderful in colour as the green grapes of
Turkestan.
Mêng Tsung walks under the red eaves of his
buildings,
Musing on the beauty of old, old China,
Listening to the dull beating of the fish-drums in the
monastery on the hill calling the attention of
God to the prayers of his monks.

Beautiful the sun of China,
Beautiful the squares of flooded rice-fields,
The long slopes of tea plants on the hills of Ning-po,
The grey mulberry-trees of Chuki,
Beautiful the cities between the rivers,
But three, and three, and three times more beautiful
The porcelains fashioned by Chou-Kiou.
See them in the sun,
Swept over by the blowing shade of willows,
Moulded like lotus-leaves,

Yellow as the skins of eels,
Black glaze overlaid with gold.
Tell the story of this porcelain
With veins like arbor-vitæ leaves and bullock's hair,
Mottled as hare's fur,
Bright and various as the wooded walls of mountains.
Here are the dawn-red wine-cups,
And the cups of snow-blue with no glisten;
Little vases, barely taller than a toad,
And great, three-part vases shining slowly like tarnished silver.
They stand in rows along the flat board
And she checks them, one by one, on a tablet of fir-flower paper,
And her eyes are little copper bells fallen in the midst of tall grass.
Tell the tale of these great jars,
Cloudy coloured as the crystal grape
With white bloom of rice-dust upon them,

Fallen over at the top by pointed bunches
Of the myriad-year wistaria.
Those smaller jars of moonlight enamel, dark and pale,
With undulating lines which seem to change.
Pots green as growing plants are green,
Marked with the hundred-fold crackle of broken ice.
Pallets painted blue with dragons,
And ample dishes, redder than fresh blood,
Spotted with crabs' claws,
Splashed with bluish flames of fire.
Here are bowls faintly tinted as tea-dust
Or the fading leaf of the camphor-tree in Autumn;
Others as bamboo paper for thickness,
Lightly spattered with vermilion fishes;
And white bowls
Surpassing hoar-frost and the pointed tips of icicles.
There are birds painted thinly in dull reds,
Fighting-cocks with rose-pink legs and crests of silver,

Teapots rough as the skin of the Kio orange, or
blistered with the little flower-buds of the
Tsong-tree.

How tell the carminates,

The greens of pale copper,

The leopard-spotted yellows,

The blues, powdered and indefinite as a Mei plum!

Globular bodies with bulbous mouths;

Slim, long porcelains confused like a weedy sea;

Porcelains, pale as the morning sky

Fluttered with purple wings of finches;

High-footed cups for green wine,

And incense-burners yellow as old Llama books

With cranes upon them.

Blue porcelain for the Altar of Heaven,

Yellow for the Altar of Earth,

Red for the Altar of the Sun,

White for the Altar of the Year-star.

All these Chou-Kiou sets down on her fir-flower tablet,

Then carefully, carefully, selects a cup

Of so keen a transparence that the sun, passing it, can
scarcely mark a shadow,
And fills it with water.
Oh! The purple fishes!
The dark-coloured fishes with scales of silver!
The blue-black fishes swerving in a trail of gold!
They move and flicker,
They swing in procession,
They dart, and hesitate, and float
With flower-waving tails —
The vase is empty again,
Smooth and open and colourless.
The tally is finished,
The sun is sinking in a rose-green sky,
And in the guard-house down the road
The red tallow candles are lighted.

It is the fifth day of the fifth month,
And all the demons of old China

Are chattering down from the mountains of the North.

Little Chou-Kiou,

Where are the spears of the sweet-flag

You should have gathered yesterday

And nailed to the door-lintel at the first flow of morning?

Little Chou-Kiou,

It is too late,

The guards have clanged the Dragon Gate.

Flags do not grow in this trodden city,

Demons laugh at the studded walls of men.

You dream of your betrothed

As you roll your tablet,

Your lover sailing the sharp seas,

Your lover of the tall junks

Trading up and down the coast

Glad when the two eyes of his ship

Are turned again to China.

Silly Chou-Kiou,

Absorbed by love and dishes,

Forgetting the evil spirits

Descending from the curled blue mountains.

* * *

Open the Gate,

Open the Gate,

His Lordship T'ang Ling,

High official to the Emperor,

Waits without the walls.

Hurry, Guards,

The sun is red,

The gate already casts a shadow.

T'ang Ling is come

To visit the porcelain factories

Of King-te-chin.

Click! Click! — loud and imperious!

It is the mandarin's outrunners,

And the rods they are carrying and striking on the ground.

Clash,

Clash,

Gongs.

Feet of men in the clouded dust,

Whipping banners scarlet and gold,

Tablet-bearers carrying his scrolls:

All of his titles,

All of his greatness,

All of his honours,

Who were his fathers,

Grim, dim, warriors,

Poems and speeches.

Pass,

Pass,

Golden the heels of the men of T'ang Ling.

Here is one staggering,

Mightily flaunting,

The heavy, flat, superb umbrella!

Spreading crimson as a lotus,

Frozen sun-disk,

Carried high before him.

Clatter! Trip! Clatter! Clatter!

See the caparisoned horses

Glittering and kicking —

How lightly ride the men of T'ang Ling!

They bear the moon fans before his face,

Honourable gentleman.

They raise the golden melon mace.

They have bamboos for the contumacious,

And chains for persons who resist the God-like will.

A space,

Rifting the procession —

Then a bright and massive thing:

His Chair!

Gold thunder carvings,

Mighty lines and fallen spirals,

Dazzling as the sun on cannon,

And he, the Proud One, T'ang Ling,

With his sapphire button,
And the plaques of his coat embroidered with one-
eyed peacocks' feathers.
Play Ch'ang flutes before him,
Make a loud music of cymbals,
Pluck sharply on the three-stringed guitars,
Prostrate yourselves,
And beat the snake-skin drums.
K'otow, Mêng Tsung,
Walk backwards past the beehive furnaces,
T'ang Ling, servant of the Yellow Emperor,
Has come to inspect the porcelain.

You must stay in the Eastern Pavilion,
Chou-Kiou,
Hiding and peeking behind the amethyst flowers of the
peonies.
But do not forget the sweet-flag
Which you did not hang upon the door

Tea appears red in white Hsing-chou porcelain,
How strange then to offer such to an official.
When T'ang Ling came to visit Mêng Tsung
They sat under a cinnamon-tree
Examining the "Pieces of a Thousand Flowers."
Coiling-dragon tea is best in black cups,
And silver vessels hold the gosling-down wine.
Lychees and finger citrons
Delight the palate of the great man,
And flat-land ginger, soft and tender to the taste;
But candied melon-rind calls for more wine.
One hundred cups is nothing to so high an officer.
Already his fingers stray in vague tappings
Among the samples of porcelain.
A dragon bowl, seven days fired, for the Palace.
What is T'ang Ling doing with the sword —
Does he dream of the campaigns of his youth,
Whirling it voraciously before him?

His sword is tempered to an edge of flame,
It cleaves the dragon bowl without a splinter.
Chou-Kiou,
Chou-Kiou,
Was the river so far that you could not reach it
yesterday before the twilight fell?
The flags which you did not pick must spear your
heart.

A diamond-marked python scuttles away under the
potting-shed,
But every one knows that evil spirits take many forms.

* * *

Drive,
Frosty sea,
Against the high beak of this junk,
Cover the painted eyes with foam.
Kuan-Yin, Goddess of sailors,

Care for this man;

Even in remembering, his betrothed has forgotten him.

It will be long — long —

Before they sit together gazing at the flowery candles.

Pirate junks make bitter waiting.

The moon above the potting-sheds is cold.

* * *

Disaster,

A great plague of disaster,

Fallen upon the factory of Mêng Tsung.

Evil spirits in clay, in water, in fire.

The clay weakens in the potter's grasp

And falls to powder on the wheel.

When the furnaces are opened,

The lovely-shaped vessels

Are run into flakes of cream

At the bottom of the seggars.

The tcha wood,

The strong, horned tcha wood,
Crisp, brittle, dried to the very bite of fire,
Hewn perfectly,
Split to an even thickness,
Piled with meticulous care by the circular pilers —
The tcha wood dies under the touch of the lighters,
It crackles as though each pore seeped water;
And the men who carry it to the ovens
Swear at the splinters buried in their flesh.
Cinnabar vases bake an acrid chrome,
Blue glaze gutters into thorns of yellow,
Fox fingers smear the delicately etched designs.
Have the P'ei-se-kong, the colour-mixers, gone mad?
The pound — pound — of their pestles seems louder
than usual.
No — pestles do not strike with such a clang:
Devil gongs beat on the roof-tiles,
Devil bells tinkle at the windows,
A bloody moon casts an ape's shadow

On the open space before the warehouse door.
There is a wailing of gibbons in the willow-trees,
But gibbons do not live in the populous city of King-te-chin.

In twos, in threes, in companies,
The servants of the factory slink away.
Chou-Kiou weeps at her painting,
For the junk with the watching eyes is desperately overdue.

Foxes dance by night in dim, old China,
And the agent of the Emperor demands the delivery of the Palace bowls.

Mêng Tsung is a crazy man,
He nods his head and claps his hands,
He sits and plays a game of chess
In a staring, stuttering idleness.
Swallows build in the eye-holes of his kilns.

See her pick her way up the stony path,
Her little feet, small as the quarters of a sweet orange,
Bear her sadly over the roughness.
The stars hang out of the sky like lotus-seeds,
It is the third watch, and the city gates are shut.
Taoist priests know many things,
And folk bewitched say nothing of difficulties.

The whine of an owl trembles along the darkness.
She runs,
Flinging her heart forward,
Reaching to it,
Floundering.

"We need light," says the Taoist priest,
And he cuts a bit of paper round like the moon
And hangs it on the wall.

And it is the moon,
Smoothly shining,
Silver and lesser silver,
Hanging from a pin.
He steps into the moon to think,
And she sees him drinking rice-wine
And slowly writing on a tablet.
The room is filled with the larkspur scent of ink.

The priest steps down from the paper moon.
He reads from a scroll,
Droning the words,
Teetering back and forth on wide, horny feet:

"The protection of the sweet-flag has been dishonourably neglected.
Chou-Kiou, accursed woman, following the toys of this present life, has hardened her mind to the teaching of the ages.

She, daughter of Mêng Tsung greatest of those who work in porcelain,
Has strayed from the path of her most respected ancestors.
Thinking of love, she forgot filial piety;
Snared by beauty, she permitted her august father's house to go unguarded.
Now a fox has entered the body of her most directly-to-be-commiserated father,
While he by whom she was truly begot lies bound in the cave of the Tiger-peaked mountain.
Weary, weary, the way of an arrogant heart,
Sad, and beyond sadness, the lot of Chou-Kiou.
With her white hands she must labour,
With her 'golden lily' feet she must stumble under terrific burdens.
The breath of her mouth must coax the flame to enter wet wood,
She must sear and burn before the hot furnaces,

And, waking many nights and days, produce in agony
a bowl
'Bright as a mirror, blue as the sky, thin as paper,
sweet-sounding to the touch as camphor-jade.'"

China!
China!
The voice of Chou-Kiou is very small,
Her eyes are pale,
Her limbs stiff as frozen thorns:
"And if I do this thing,
What of him, Wu, my betrothed?"
"The scroll is written," said the Taoist priest.
The Gods are many and confused in old, dim China.

* * *

Morning leaping from the rims of the mountains;
Darkness leaning farther and farther over a descending sun.

Clouds bring rain,
And winds dry the pools of it.
The North-west wind whirls dust over the willow-trees;
Wild duck and teal cross and re-cross King-te-chin
In search of water,
And the hurry of their wings
Is the rush of the Northern monsoon
Sweeping the gulf of Tonkin.
Chou-Kiou pounds the blue clay,
Kneading it with effort to its finest granules.

Days and Days —
The smartweed reddens on the river shoals;
Eye-fruit and pears are dropping in the gardens;
Floating elm-leaves gild running water;
The pinnacles of the Dragon Mountains are clear
above red mist.
Chou-Kiou paints a crane and two mandarin ducks
Under a persimmon-tree.

She dips the jar, and poises it,
But her ears are numb with the heavy sound of the sea.

Cold winds.
Long Autumn.
"Leaves touched by frost are redder than flowers of
the second moon."
How drag the great wood,
How build it into a circle of fire,
Waveringly uncertain on the "golden lily" feet?
Shêng! Shêng! The water-clock marks an hour which
has gone.

The wind is sad, blowing ceaselessly from the clear
stars,
The lamp-flower flickers and dies down.
Is her shadow some one?
Is she, perhaps, not alone?

She raises the bamboo blind,
Snow is falling,
The branches of the Winter plum-tree
Glitter like jade hairpins against a white sky.
Brooms brush little snow,
Her fox father laughs and rattles his chess-men.
Chou-Kiou,
Bones under frosty water
Bleach as white as the jade-coloured branches of the
    plum-tree:
You remember now,
Sweeping from dawn till evening
A pathway to the kilns.

She has blown upon the fire and kindled it,
She has set her fragile bowl in the midst of the flame.
She lifts her eyes from the red fire
For green Spring is like smoke in the willow-trees.

The rivers run flooding over the wharves of King-te-
chin.
She hears the porters shouting: "Way! Way!"
In the streets, going up and down from the boats.
But about her is only the harsh sound of fire,
And a crow calling: "Ka! Ka! Ka!"
In a mulberry-tree.

Ashes of fire,
Ashes of the days of the World!
If failure, then another long beginning.
Why hope,
Why think that Spring must bring relenting.
O man of this woman,
Where on all the Spring-flown oceans
Is your junk?
Where your heart that you cannot hear the cuckoos
calling from the fir woods of the Golden Yoke
Cliff?

China blossoms above her sea-beaches,
Her trees break budding to an early sun,
Foot-boats fly along the blue rivers,
But Chou-Kiou sobs as brick by brick she opens the
cooled kiln.

Oh, marvel of lightness!
Oh, colour hidden and all at once emphatically clear!
Like a bright moon carved in ice,
Green as the thousand peaks,
Blue as the sky after rain,
Violet as the skin of an egg-plant fruit,
Then once again white,
White as the "secretly-smiling" magnolia,
And singing a note when struck
Sharp and full as all the hundred and fifty bells
On the Porcelain Tower of Nankin.

This bowl is worth one hundred taels of silver.
Pour in the black dragon tea,

Plucked in April before the Spring rains,

This shall be a libation to Kuan-Yin,

Goddess of Mercy.

Chou-Kiou has no wine.

Fragrant Goddess, despise not the yellow tea.

But the tea bubbles,

It moves like waves in a short bay,

It tumbles with a glitter of rainbows.

Wing-flare widening out of the cup —

The great crane sweeps into the air.

He circles round Chou-Kiou,

Circles, circles —

With him are the mandarin ducks.

The air is dark with wings,

It is bright with the clipping and cutting

Of quickly-flickered wings.

In a whirl of wind,

Something comes twirling and dazzling out of the

house,

Flapping in plum-coloured silks,

Confusing with motion,

Blurred,

Without contour.

It is a man —

It is a bit of paper —

It is a bamboo-silk cocoon —

It blows, turning — turning — toward the bowl,

It is blown into the bowl —

The tea is red,

It leaps, water-spouting, into the air.

It soars over the red roof-tiles,

It glitters like a pagoda hot with lamps,

And then descends,

Sucking, into the bowl,

Sucking, out of the bowl,

Disappearing where there is no hole.

It is a beautiful piece,
With white and grey peonies and yellow persimmons.
There are no birds, only flowers,
Starting in a chord of colours out of violet haze.
Chou-Kiou has fainted,
She does not hear Mêng Tsung
Calling to her from the Terrace of the Peach-Trees.

* * *

I read this tale in the "Azure Sky Bookshop," in the ninth month of the sixth year of Tô Kwong.

When I had reached this point, the shadow of a thirty-two-paper kite fell upon my page, and raising my eyes to the sky, the whiteness of the sun dazzled me, and I inadvertently turned over the leaves of the book.

How many I turned, I do not know, but when I could see again after the blindness of the sky I read

at once, not daring to go back for the leap of the story upon which I had fallen —

"Pity, pity me,
For my flesh cries night and morning;
The darkness hears me,
And the tongues of the darkness babble back his name.
I am eager and thwarted.
Daughter I am,
And as a daughter I have given my brain and my body
To restore my father's house.
Alone, with bleeding feet and frozen hands,
I have lifted the curse fallen upon my people;
I have toiled without sleep
Until the sight of my eyes was broken.
Hungering for days, chattering with cold and sorrow,
I have not suffered my heart to weaken.
My prayers have risen incessantly to the thirty-three
Heavens.

All powerful Goddess, you have regarded me,
And taken me under your protection.
I am a worm,
Spurning the mulberry-leaf to cry upon the moon.
Holy Kuan-Yin, of the thousand eyes, and the thousand arms, and the merciful heart,
I beseech a farther clemency.
You, who answer the longings of the sterile,
Do not mock me with a half-completed pardon.
Daughter I am, Kuan-Yin,
But I am also a woman.
I love as women here in China must not,
But as you know very well they must and do.
Glory has once more entered into my father's heart,
All day he watches his men.
He weighs the precious blue earth and numbers it.
He oversees the lame men who knead the clay,
He praises and chides the painters,

And rises in the night to superintend the firers.
King-te-chin hums like a hive at swarming time
Between its rivers,
And this is the loudest of all the factories of King-te-chin.
Only I am desolate.
I am as the shadow of a bamboo upon bleached sand,
My eyes are black and colourless seeking the boats on the long canals,
My ears rattle waiting for the sharp sound of a voice at the gate.
Once more I will work, Kuan-Yin,
I will use all my skill to honour you.
I will fashion you in such a manner that your eyes will laugh to see it.
I will make a figure of you in fine silk porcelain
And set it in the temple where all can see,
And, looking, their hearts will be to you as coral beads on a string of white gold

For your hand's stretching,

And for an ornament upon your breast forever."

Then Chou-Kiou tightened her willow-coloured girdle

And sat down to the modelling board.

And on the fifteenth day the figure was completed,

Not entirely to Chou-Kiou's dissatisfaction.

Underneath it she wrote: "Made at the Brilliant Colours Hall."

And again: "Reverentially made by Chou-Kiou, daughter of Mêng Tsung Captain of the Banner promoted four honorary grades, also Director of a Porcelain Manufactory at King-te-chin in the Province of Kiangsi: and presented by her to the Temple of the Holy God of Heaven to remain through everlasting time as an offering of a grateful heart and as a glory in the eyes of men: on a fortunate day in the Spring of the 6th year of the reign of the Emperor Ch'ien-lung."

For days she paints it,
Rubbing the gold with garlic-bulbs
To fix its lustre.
Laying copper-foil about it to heighten the colour,
Setting it with careful blue:
The blue of little stones,
The blue of the precious stone Meï-Kouei-tse-yeou,
The blue of the head of Buddha.
She dreams of beauty,
And the face of the figure is lovely as her dreams;
But has it not been written: "It is useless to cast a net
to catch the image of the moon."

Night over China,
Night over old, distant China,
Dark night over the city of King-te-chin.
Chou-Kiou,

Chou-Kiou,

Your eyes are red watching the flames of a furnace,

And the great shield of wood you hold

Scarcely protects you from the bursting heat of the

kiln.

For three days and three nights

You have tended a flowing fire;

For two days and two nights

You have watched before a fierce fire;

Now the seggar is red and passing into a white heat,

It is bright in front and behind.

At cock-crow you will stop the fire,

But to-night you watch,

And your eyes are salt

As though you stood before the sea.

A wind teases the willow-trees,

They rustle,

And fling the moonlight from them like spray.

And then snow fell from the midst of the moon.
The flakes were like willow-flowers,
They drifted down slowly,
And the brilliance of the moon struck upon them as
they fell
So that all the air was flowing with silver,
And walking in the arc of it was a woman
Who cast a whip-like shadow before her
From the brightness of the snow and the white, round
moon.

All the flowers bend toward her,
The grass by the ring-fence lies horizontally to reach
her,
She moves with the movement of wind over water,
And it is no longer the moon which casts her shadow
But she who sets shadows curving outward
From the pebbles at her feet.

Her dress is Ch'ing-green playing into scarlet,
Embroidered with the hundred shous;
The hem is a slow delight of gold, the faded, beautiful
gold of temple carvings;
In her hair is a lotus,
Red as the sun after rain.
She comes softly — softly —
And the tinkle of her ornaments
Jars the smooth falling of the snow
So that it breaks into jagged lightnings
Which form about her the characters of her holy name:
Kuan-Yin, Goddess of Mercy, of Sailors, of all who
know sorrow and grieve in bitterness.

Ochre-red sails are dark in moonlight,
But the red heart of man is like a water-clock dripping
the hours;
Lost days weigh many ounces of silver,
But green Spring is worth blood and gold.

Snow ceases falling,
Moonlight is no longer broken, but a single piece.
Her eyebrows are fine as the edge of distant mountains,
Her eyes are clear as the T'ung-T'ing lake in Autumn,
Her face is sweet as almond-flowers in a wind.
The breath of her passing is cool;
Her gesture is a plum-blossom waving.
She mounts the step
And looks into the eye-hole of the kiln.
One — two — three, the pulse of Chou-Kiou,
Beating to a given time, like music.
The coals of the fire are not fierce now
But gentle,
They lie in the form of roses
And the scent of them is the urgent scent of musk.

A watchman calls the hour
And strikes on his bamboo drum.

The moon fades down a long green sky.
There is no one on the step,
No flight of silks down the pathway,
Chou-Kiou sickens to a weariness which eats her
bones.
She rakes the scattered embers.
The firing is done.

Spring day.
How sharp the pheasants' cry,
Like metal!
This year the bamboo flowers,
This year the many-petalled peonies
Are large as rising moons.
The men of the "Brilliant Coloured Factory" stand
In their blue jackets,
In their dark-purple silk jackets,
In a curve like the bow moon,
Watching Chou-Kiou advancing to the furnace.
And Mêng Tsung stands,

Fearfully watching.

No one must touch,

No one must caution,

No one must pray.

It is between Chou-Kiou and the Gods.

How do her ancestors in the thirty-three Heavens?

Do they watch?

Do they listen?

Do they desire and remain silent?

Ten times round her hands

The cloth is wrapped.

Yet will they be blistered —

But it is cool!

Cold!

And the seggar falls apart without a touch.

Fragrant Goddess,

Whose heart is of snow and rubies,

Is this the figure made by Chou-Kiou?

Not so, certainly.

Slimmer,

Lovelier,

More quaintly golden.

This face is clouds and flowers,

These eyes are wind and flame,

This body is jade and silver.

Her dress is the smoky green of Autumn lakes

Flashed and tinted to immediate scarlet,

It is embroidered with the hundred shous.

Poised is this figure,

Balanced like a music

Of flageolets and harps under the Dawn.

Men cover their faces,

Here is a beauty to turn the dart of arrows.

But Chou-Kiou's figure was single,

This is triplicate.

Attendants guard the dazzling Goddess.

One (who dares to see it!) Chou-Kiou,

In her peach-bloom dress with the willow-coloured
girdle,
And clasped and cherished in her hands
The sacred peach.
The other is a man,
Blue-dressed as in running waves,
Bronze and crimson with the rake of the sea.
The gate-keepers shout his name,
Swift are his steps,
Like songs for gladness
His footsteps,
He is a straight shaft of sapphire,
He is a peacock feather borne upon a spear.
He and she before the Goddess,
Heads in the dust.
Not alone do the bamboos flower;
Here are blossoms and fruit.
Kuan-Yin, Goddess of Mercy, of Sailors, of Sterile
Women,

For what they pray let them have full answer:
Guide them as with a torch,
Scatter snow and heat like the cool of the moon,
Defend them against enemies as a moat or a city,
Save them in danger as a father or mother,
Quicken them as rain and sun,
Bless the seed of this man as corn under a rich sun,
Bless the womb of this woman as fishes are blessed by
the sea.

Then the multitude rose up
And proclaimed them mighty.
They placed her in the scarlet palanquin
And brought her before him.
They lit the flower candles;
With painted lanterns in broad daylight they lined the
roads.
Drums and musicians played forever,
And fireworks blazed in the heart of the sky.

So the day fell
And the night came,
And the lizard-skin drums struck midnight,
And the marriage was accomplished.
Sweetly the moon slept in the willow-trees,
And the man and the woman slept under the green
eyelids of the Dawn.

* * *

When I finished the book, night had come.
I could not part with it, so I bought it for two ounces of
silver.
Did I overprize it, do you think?
It is only a tale of old, dead China.

# MANY SWANS

## Sun Myth of the North American Indians

When the Goose Moon rose and walked upon a pale sky, and water made a noise once more beneath the ice on the river, his heart was sick with longing for the great good of the sun. One Winter again had passed, one Winter like the last. A long sea with waves biting each other under grey clouds, a shroud of snow from ocean to forest, snow mumbling stories of bones and driftwood beyond his red fire. He desired space, light; he cried to himself about himself, he made songs of sorrow and wept in the corner of his house. He gave his children toys to keep them away from him. His eyes were dim following the thin sun. He said to his wife: "I want that sun. Some day I

shall go to see it." And she said: "Peace, be still. You will wake the children."

So he waited, and the Whirlwind Moon came, a crescent — mounted, and marched down beyond the morning, and was gone. Then the Extreme Cold Moon came and shone, it mounted, moved night by night into morning and faded through day to darkness. He watched the Old Moon pass, he saw the Eagle Moon come and go. Slowly the moons wound across the snow, and many nights he could not see them, he could only hear the waves raving foam and fury until dawn.

Now the Goose Moon told him things, but his blood lay sluggish within him until the moon stood full and apart in the sky. His wife asked why he was silent. "I have wept my eyes dry," he answered. "Give me my cedar bow and my two-winged arrows with the copper points. I will go into

the forest and kill a moose, and bring fresh meat for the children."

All day he stalked the forest. He saw the marks of bears' claws on the trees. He saw the wide tracks of a lynx, and the little slot-slot of a jumping rabbit, but nothing came along. Then he made a melancholy song for himself: "My name is Many Swans, but I have seen neither sparrow nor rabbit, neither duck nor crane. I will go home and sit by the fire like a woman and spin cedar bark for fish-lines."

Then silver rain ran upon him through the branches from the moon, and he stepped upon open grass and laughed at the touch of it under his foot. "I will shoot the moon," he thought, "and cut it into cakes for the children."

He laid an arrow on his bow and shot, and the copper tip made it shine like a star flying. He watched

to see it fall, but it did not. He shot again, and his arrow was a bright star until he lost it in the brilliance of the moon. Soon he had shot all his arrows, and he stood gaping up at the moonshine wishing he had not lost them.

Then Many Swans laughed again because his feet touched grass, not snow. And he gathered twigs and stuck them in his hair, and saw his shadow like a tree walking there. But something tapped the twigs, he stood tangled in something. With his hand he felt it, it was the feather head of an arrow. It dangled from the sky, and the copper tip jangled upon wood and twinkled brightly. This — that — and other twinkles, pricking against the soft flow of the moon, and the wind crooned in the arrow-feathers and tinkled the bushes in his hair.

Many Swans laid his hand on the arrow and began to

climb — up — up — a long time. The earth lay beneath him wide and blue, he climbed through white moonlight and purple air until he fell asleep from weariness.

Sunlight struck sidewise on a chain of arrows; below were cold clouds; above, a sky blooming like an open flower and he aiming to the heart of it. Many Swans saw that up was far, and down was also far, but he cried to himself that he had begun his journey to the sun. Then he pulled a bush from his hair, and the twigs had leaved and fruited, and there were salmon-berries dancing beneath the leaves. "My father, the sun, is good," said Many Swans, and he eat the berries and went on climbing the arrows into the heart of the sky.

He climbed till the sun set and the moon rose, and at midmost moon he fell asleep to the sweeping of the arrow-ladder like a cradle in the wind.

When dawn struck gold across the ladder, he awoke. "It is Summer," said Many Swans, "I cannot go back, it must be more days down than I have travelled. I should be ashamed to see my children, for I have no meat for them." Then he remembered the bushes, and pulled another from his hair, and there were blue huckleberries shining like polished wood in the midst of leaves. "The sun weaves the seasons," thought Many Swans, "I have been under and over the warp of the world, now I am above the world," and he went on climbing into the white heart of the sky.

Another night and day he climbed, and he eat red huckleberries from his last bush, and went on — up and up — his feet scratching on the ladder with a great noise because of the hush all round him. When he reached an edge, he stepped over it carefully, for edges are thin and he did not wish to fall. He found a tall pine-tree by a pond. "Be-

yond can wait," reasoned Many Swans, "this is surely a far country." And he lay down to sleep under the pine-tree, and it was the fourth sleep he had had since he went hunting moose to bring meat to his family.

The shadow crept away from him, and the sun came and sat upon his eyelids, so that by and by he opened them and rubbed his eyes because a woman stared at him, and she was beautiful as a salmon leaping in Spring. Her skirt was woven of red and white cedar bark, she had carved silver bracelets and copper bracelets set with haliotis shell, and ear-rings of sharks' teeth. She sparkled like a river salmon, and her smile was water tipping to a light South breeze. She pleased the heart of Many Swans so that fear was not in him, only longing to take her for himself as a man does a woman, and he asked her name. "Grass-Bush-

and-Blossom is my name," she answered. "I am come after you. My grandmother has sent me to bring you to her house." "And who is your grandmother?" asked Many Swans. But the girl shook her head, and took a pinch of earth from the ground and threw it toward the sun. "She has many names. The grass knows her, and the trees, and the fishes in the sea. I call her 'grandmother,' but they speak of her as 'The-One-Who-Walks-All-Over-the-Sky.'" Many Swans marvelled and said nothing, for things are different in a far country.

They walked together, and the man hungered for the woman and could not wait. But she said no word, and he eat up her beauty as though it were a ripe foam-berry and still went fasting until his knees trembled, and his heart was like hot dust, and his hands ached to thrust upon her and turn her toward him. So they went, and Many Swans for-

got his wife and children and the earth hanging below the sharp edge of the sky.

* * *

The South wind sat on a rock and never ceased to blow, locking the branches of the trees together; a flock of swans rose out of the South-East, one and seven, making strange, changing lines across a smooth sky. Wild flax-blossoms ran blue over the bases of black and red totem poles. The colours were strong as blood and death, they rattled like painted drums against the eyesight. "Many Swans!" said the girl and smiled. "Blood and death," drummed the totem poles. "Alas!" nodded the flax. The man heeded nothing but the woman and the soles of his feet beating on new ground.

The houses were carved with the figures of the Spring Salmon. They were carved in the form of a rain-

bow. Hooked noses stood out above doorways, crooked wooden men crouched, frog-shaped, gazing under low eaves. It was a beautiful town, ringing with colours, singing brightly, terribly, in the smooth light. All the way was sombre and gay, and the man walked and said nothing.

They came to a house painted black and carved with stars. In the centre was a round moon with a door in it. So they entered and sat beside the fire, and the woman gave the man fish-roes and gooseberries, but his desire burnt him and he could not eat.

Grass-Bush-and-Blossom saw his trouble, and she led him to a corner, and showed him many things. There were willow arrows and quivers for them. There were mountain-goat blankets and painted blankets of two elk-skins, there were buffalo-skins, and dresssed buckskins, and deerskins with young, soft hair. But Many Swans cared for

nothing but the swing of the woman's bark skirt, and the sting of her loveliness which gave him no peace.

Grass-Bush-and-Blossom led him to another corner, and showed him crest helmets, and wooden armour; she showed him coppers like red rhododendron blooms, and plumes of eagles' wings. She gave him clubs of whalebone to handle, and cedar trumpets which blow a sound cool and sweet as the noise of bees. But Many Swans found no ease in looking save at her arms between the bracelets, and his trouble grew and pressed upon him until he felt strangled.

She led him farther and showed him a canoe painted silver and vermilion with white figures of fish upon it, and the gunwales fore and aft were set with the teeth of the sea-otter. She lifted out the paddles, the blades were shaped like hearts and striped with fire hues. She said, "Choose. These

are mine and my grandmother's. Take what you will." But Many Swans was filled with the glory of her standing as a young tree about to blossom, and he took her and felt her sway and fold about him with the tightness of new leaves. "This" — said Many Swans, "this — for am I not a man!" So they abode and the day ran gently past them, slipping as river water, and evening came, and someone entered, darkening the door.

Then Grass-Bush-and-Blossom wrapped her cedar-bark skirt about her and sprang up, and her silver and copper ornaments rang sweetly with her moving. The-One-Who-Walks-All-Over-the-Sky looked at Many Swans. "You have not waited," she said. "Alas! It is an evil beginning. My son, my son, I wished to love you." But he was glad and thought: "It is a querulous old woman, I shall heed her no more than the crackling of a fire of frost-bitten twigs."

The old woman went behind the door and hung up something. It pleased him. It was shining. When he woke in the night, he saw it in the glow of the fire. He liked it, and he liked the skins he lay on and the woman who lay with him. He thought only of these things.

In the morning, the old woman unhooked the shining object and went out, and he turned about to his wife and said sharp, glad words to her and she to him, and the sun shone into the house until evening, and in the night again he was happy, because of the thing that glittered and flashed and moved to and fro, clashing softly on the wall.

The days were many. He did not count them. Every morning the old woman took out the shining thing, and every evening she brought it home, and all night it shone and cried "Ching-a-ling" as it dangled against the wall.

Moons and moons went by, no doubt. Many Swans did not reckon them out. Was there an earth? Was there a sky? He remembered nothing. He did not try. And then one day, wandering along the street of carved houses, he heard a song. He heard the beat of rattles and drums, and the shrill humming of trumpets blown to a broken rhythm:

"Haiõõ'a! Haiõõ!
Many salmon are coming ashore,
They are coming ashore to you, the post of our heaven,
They are dancing from the salmon's country to the shore.
I come to dance before you at the right-hand side of the world, overtowering, outshining, surpassing all: I, the Salmon!
Haiõõ'a! Haiõõ!"

And the drums rumbled like the first thunder of a

year, and the rattles pattered like rain on flower petals, and the trumpets hummed as wind hums in round-leafed trees; and people ran, jumping, out of the Spring Salmon house and leapt to the edge of the sky and disappeared, falling quickly, calling the song to one another as they fell so that the sound of it continued rising up for a long time.

Many Swans listened, and he recollected that when the Spring salmon jump, the children say: "Ayuu! Do it again!" He thought of his children and his wife whom he had left on the earth, and wondered who had brought them meat, who had caught fish for them, and he was sad at his thoughts and wept, saying: "I want to shoot birds for my children. I want to spear trout for my children." So he went back to his house, and his feet dragged behind him like nets drawn across sand.

He lay down upon his bed and grieved, because he had

no children in the sky, and because the wife of his youth was lost to him. He would not eat, but lay with his head covered and made no sound.

Then Grass-Bush-and-Blossom asked him: "Why do you grieve?" But he was silent. And again she said: "Why do you grieve?" But he answered nothing. And she asked him many times, until at last he told her of his children, of his other wife whom he had left, and she was pitiful because she loved him.

When the old woman came, she also said: "What ails your husband that he lies there saying nothing?" And Grass-Bush-and-Blossom answered: "He is homesick. We must let him depart."

Many Swans heard what she said, and he got up and made himself ready. Now the old woman looked sadly at him. "My son," she said, "I told you it was a bad beginning. But I wish to love you.

Choose among these things what you will have, and return to your people."

Many Swans pointed to the shining thing behind the door and said: "I will have that." But the old woman would not give it to him. She offered him spears of bone, and yew bows, and arrows winged with ducks' feathers. But he would not have them. She offered him strings of blue and white shells, and a copper canoe with a sternboard of copper and a copper bailer. He would not take them. He wanted the thing that glittered and cried "Ching-a-ling" as it dangled against the wall. She offered him all that was in the house. But he liked that great thing that was shining there. When that thing turned round it was shining so that one had to close one's eyes. He said: "That only will I have." Then she gave it to him, saying: "You wanted it. I wished to love

you, and I do love you." She hung it on him. "Now go home."

Many Swans ran swiftly, he ran to the edge of the sky, there he found the ladder of the rainbow. He put his foot on it and went down, and he felt strong and able to do anything. He forgot the sky and thought only of the earth.

Many Swans made a song as he went down the rainbow ladder. He sang with a loud voice:

"I will go and tear to pieces Mount Stevens, I will use it for stones for my fire.

I will go and break Mount Qa'tsta'is, I will use it for stones for my fire."

All day and all night he went down, and he was so strong he did not need to sleep. The next day he made a new song. He shouted it with a great noise:

"I am going all round the world,
I am at the centre of the world,
I am the post of the world,
On account of what I am carrying in my hand."

This pleased him, and he sang it all day and was not tired at all.

Four nights and days he was going down the ladder, and every day he made a song, and the last was the best. This was it:

"Oh wonder! He is making a turmoil on the earth.
Oh wonder! He makes the noise of falling objects on the earth.
Oh wonder! He makes the noise of breaking objects on the earth."

He did not really mean this, but it was a good song. That is the way with people who think themselves clever. Many Swans sang this song a great many

times, and on the fourth day, when the dawn was red, he touched the earth and walked off upon it.

* * *

When Many Swans arrived on the earth, he was not very near his village. He stood beneath a sea-cliff, and the rocks of the cliff were sprinkled with scarlet moss as it might have been a fall of red snow, and lilac moss smouldered between boulders of pink granite. Far out, the sea sparkled all colours like an abalone shell, and red fish sprang from it — one and another, over its surface. As he gazed, a shadow slipped upon the water, and, looking up, he saw a raven flying and overturning as it flew. Red fish, black raven — blood and death — but Many Swans called "Haiohō-hō!" and danced a long time on the sea-sand because he felt happy in his heart.

He heard a robin singing, and as it sang he walked

along the shore and counted his fingers for the headlands he must pass to reach home. He saw the canoes come out to fish, he said the names of his friends who should be in them. He thought of his house and the hearth strewn with white shells and sand. When the canoes of twelve rowers passed, he tried to signal them, but they went by too far from land. The way seemed short, for all day he told himself stories of what people would say to him. "I shall be famous, my fame will reach to the ends of the world. People will try to imitate me. Every one will desire to possess my power." So Many Swans said foolish things to himself, and the day seemed short until the evening when he came in sight of his village.

At the dusky time of night, he came to it, and he heard singing, so he knew his people were having a festival. He could hear the dance-sticks clattering on

the cedar boards and the moon-rattles whirling, and he could see the smoke curling out of the smoke-holes. Then he shouted very much and ran fast; but, as he ran, the thing which he carried in his hands shook and cried: "We shall strike your town." Then Many Swans went mad; he turned, swirling like a great cloud, he rose as a pillar of smoke and bent in the wind as smoke bends, he streamed as bands of black smoke, and out of him darted flames, red-mouthed flames, so that they scorched his hair. His hands were full of blood, and he yelled "Break! Break! Break! Break!" and did not know whose voice it was shouting.

There was a tree, and a branch standing out from it, and fire came down and hung on the end of the branch. He thought it was copper which swung on the tree, because it twirled and had a hard edge. Then it split as though a wedge had riven

it, and burst into purple flame. The tree was consumed, and the fire leapt laughing upon the houses and poured down through the roofs upon the people. The flame-mouths stuck themselves to the houses and sucked the life from all the people, the flames swallowed themselves and brought forth little flames which ran a thousand ways like young serpents just out of their eggs, till the fire girdled the village and the water in front curdled and burned like oil.

Then Many Swans knew what he had done, and he tried to throw away his power which was killing everybody. But he could not do it. The people lay there dead, and his wife and children among the dead people. His heart was sick, and he cried: "The weapon flew into my hands with which I am murdering," and he tried to throw it away, but it stuck to his flesh. He tried to cut it apart with his knife, but the blade turned and blunted.

He cried bitterly: "Ka! Ka! Ka! Ka!" and tried to break what he wore on a stone, but it did not break. Then he cut off his hair and blackened his face, and turned inland to the spaces of the forest, for his heart was dead with his people. And the moon followed him over the tops of the trees, but he hated the moon because it reminded him of the sky.

* * *

A long time Many Swans wandered in the forest. White-headed eagles flew over the trees and called down to him: "There is the man who killed everybody." By night the owls hooted to each other: "The man who sleeps has blood on him, his mouth is full of blood, he let loose his power on his own people." Many Swans beat upon his breast and pleaded with the owls: "You with ears far apart who hear everything, you the owls, it

was not I who killed, but this evil thing I carry and which I cannot put down." But the owls laughed, shrill, mournful, broken laughs, repeating the words they had said, so that Many Swans could not sleep and in the morning he was so weak he shook when he walked.

He walked among pines which flowed before him in straight, opening lines like water, and the wind in the pine-branches wearied his soul as he heard it all day long. At first he eat nothing, but when he stumbled and fell for faintness he gathered currants and partridge-berries and so made his feet carry him on.

He came to a wood of red firs where fire had been before him. The heartwood of the firs was all burnt out, but the trees stood on stilts of sapwood and mocked the man who slew with fire.

He passed through woods of spear-leaf trees, with sharp vines head-high all about them. He thrust

the thing he carried into the vines and tried to let go of it, but it would not stay tangled and came away in his hand.

He heard the slap of beavers' tails on water, and saw muskrats building cabins with the stalks of wild rice in shoal water, but they scattered as he came near. The little animals fled before him in fear, chattering to each other. Even the bears deserted the huckleberry bushes when they heard the fall of his foot, so that he walked alone. Above him, the waxwings were catching flies in the spruce-tops, they were happy because it was Summer and warm, they were the only creatures too busy to look down at the man who moved on as one who never stops, making his feet go always because there was nothing else to do.

By and by the trees thinned, and Many Swans saw beyond them to a country of tall grass. He rested

here some time eating fox-grapes and blackberries, for indeed he was almost famished, and weary with the sickness of solitude. He thought of the ways of men, and hungered after speech and comforting. But he saw no man, and the prairie frightened him, rolling endlessly to the sky.

At last his blood quickened again, and the longing for people beat a hard pulse in his throat so that he rose and went on, seeking where he might find men. For days he sought, following the trails of wild horses and buffalo, tripping among the crawling pea-vines, bruised and baffled, blind with the sharp shimmer of the grass.

Then suddenly they came, riding out of the distance on both sides of him. These men wore eagle-plume bonnets, and their horses went so fast he could not see their legs. They ran glittering toward one another, whooping and screaming, and the horses' tails streamed out behind them

stiffly like bunches of bones. Each man lay prone on his horse and shot arrows, hawk-feathered arrows, owl-feathered arrows, and they were terrible in swiftness because the feathers had not been cut or burned to make them low.

The arrows flew across one another like a swarm of grasshoppers leaping, and the men foamed forward as waves foam at a double tide.

They came near, bright men, fine as whips, striding lithe cat horses. One rode a spotted horse, and on his head was an upright plume of the tail-feathers of the black eagle. One rode a buckskin horse, long-winded and chary as a panther. One rode a sorrel horse painted with zigzag lightnings. One rode a clay-coloured horse, and the figure of a kingfisher was stamped in blue on its shoulder. Wildcat running horses, and their hoofs rang like thunder-drums on the ground, and the men yelled with brass voices:

"We who live are coming.

Ai-ya-ya-yai!

We are coming to kill.

Ai-ya-ya-yai!

We are coming with the snake arrows,

We are coming with the tomahawks

Which swallow their faces.

Ai-ya-ya-yai!

We will hack our enemies.

Ai-ya-ya-yai!

We will take many scalps.

Ai-ya-ya-yai!

We will kill — kill — till every one is dead.

Ai-ya-ya-ya-yai!"

Many Swans lay in a buffalo wallow and hid, and a white fog slid down from the North and covered the prairie. For a little time he heard the war-whoops and the pit-pit of hitting arrows, and then he heard nothing, and he lay beneath the cold fog

hurting his ears with listening. When the sky was red in the evening and the fog was lifted, he shifted himself and looked above the grass. "Alas! Alas!" wept Many Swans, "the teeth of their arrows were like dogs' teeth. They have devoured their enemies." For nobody was there, but the arrows were sticking up straight in the ground. Then Many Swans went a long way round that place for he thought that the stomachs of the arrows must be full of blood. And so he went on alone over the prairie, and his heart was black with what he had seen.

* * *

A stream flowed in a sunwise turn across the prairie, and the name of the stream was "Burnt Water," because it tasted dark like smoke. The prairie ran out tongues of raw colours — blue of camass, red of geranium, yellow of parsley — at the young

green grass. The prairie flung up its larks on a string of sunshine, it lay like a catching-sheet beneath the black breasts balancing down on a wind, calling "See it! See it! See it!" in little round voices.

Antelope and buffalo,
Threading the tall green grass they go,
To and fro, to and fro.
And painted Indians ride in a row,
With arrow and bow, arrow and bow,
Hunting the antelope, the buffalo.
Truly they made a gallant show
Across the prairie's bright green flow,
Warriors painted indigo,
Brown antelope, black buffalo,
Long ago.

* * *

Now when he heard the barking of dogs, and saw the bundles of the dead lashed to the cottonwood-trees, Many Swans knew that he was near a village. He stood still, for he dared not go on because of the thing which he had with him. He said to himself, "My mind is not strong enough to manage it. My mind is afraid of it." But he longed to speak with men, and so he crept a little nearer until he could see the painted tepees standing in the edge of the sunshine, and smell the smoke of dried sweet grass. Many Swans heard the tinkling of small bells from the buffalo tails hung on the tepees, he saw the lodge ears move gently in the breeze. He heard talk, the voices of men, and he cried aloud and wept, holding his hands out toward the village.

Then the thing which he was carrying shook, and said: "We shall strike that town." Many Swans heard

it, and he tried to keep quiet. He tried to throw the thing down, but his hands closed. He could not keep his mind, and his senses flew away so that he was crazy. He heard a great voice shouting: "Break! Break! Break! Break!" but he did not know that it was his own voice.

Back over the prairie sprang up a round cloud, and fire rose out of the heart of the grass. The reds and yellows of the flowers exploded into flame, showers of sparks rattled on the metal sky, which turned purple and hurtled itself down upon the earth. Winds charged the fire, lashing it with long thongs of green lightning, herding the flames over the high grass; and the fire screamed and danced and blew blood whistles, and the scarlet feet of the fire clinked a tune of ghost-bells on the shells of the dry cane brakes. Animals ran — ran — ran — and were overtaken, shaken grass glittered up with a roar and spilled its birds like burnt paper

into the red air. The eagle's wing melted where it flew, the hills of the prairie grew mountain-high, amazed with light, and were obscured. The people in the village ran — ran — and the fire shot them down with its red and gold arrows and whirled on, crumpling the tepees so that the skins of them popped like corn. Then the bodies of the dead in the trees took fire with a hard smoke, and the burning of the cottonwoods choked Many Swans as he fled. His nostrils smelt the dead, and he was very sick and could not move. Then the fire made a ring round him, and he stood in the midst by the Burnt River and wrung his hands until the skin tore. He took the thing he wore and tried to strip it off in the fork of a tree, but it did not come off at all. He cried: "Ka! Ka! Ka! Ka!" and leapt into the river and tried to drown the thing, but when he rose it rose with him and came out of the water gleaming so that its

wake rippled red and silver a long way down the stream.

Then Many Swans lamented bitterly and cried: "The thing I wanted is bad," but he had the thing and he could not part from it. He rolled in the stones and the bushes to scrape it off, but it clung to him and grew in his flesh like hair. Therefore Many Swans dragged himself up to go on, although the heat of the burnt grass scorched his feet and everything was dead about him. He heard nothing, for there was nobody to mock any more.

* * *

Mist rises along the river bottoms, and ghost-voices hiss an old death-song to a false, faint tune. The branches of willows beat on the moon, pound, pound, with a thin, far sound, shaking and shrilling the wonder tale, the thunder tale, of a nation's killing:

The Nation's drum has fallen down.
Beat — beat — and a double beat!
Ashes are the grass of a lodge-pole town.
Rattle — rattle — on a moon that is sinking.
Out of the North come drift winds wailing.
Beat — beat — and a double beat!
In the frost-blue West, a crow is ailing.
The streams, the water streams, are shrinking!

He gave an acre and we gave him brass.
Beat — beat — and a double beat!
Beautiful and bitter are the roses in the grass.
Rattle — rattle — on a moon that is sinking.
A knife painted red and a knife painted black.
Beat — beat — and a double beat!
Green mounds under a hackmatack.
The streams, the water streams, are shrinking!

Is there Summer in the Spring? Who will
bring the South?
Beat — beat — and a double beat!
Shall honey drop from the green snake's
mouth?
Rattle — rattle — on a moon that is sinking.
A red-necked buzzard in an incense tree.
Beat — beat — and a double beat!
And a poison leaf from Gethsemane.
The streams, the water streams, are shrinking.

* * *

Now Many Swans walked over cinders, and there was no sprig or root that the fire had left. Therefore he grew weaker day by day, and at night he lay awake tortured for food, and he prayed to the Earth, saying: "Mother Earth have pity on me and give me to eat," but the ears of the Earth

were stopped with cinders. Then, after five sleeps, suddenly before him grew a bush of service-berries which the fire had not taken. Many Swans gathered the berries and appeased his hunger. He said: "The berries that grow are blessed, for now I shall live." Yet he knew that he did not want to live, only his hunger raged fiercely within him and he could not stand against it. He took cinders and powdered them, and mixed them with river water, and made his body black, and so he set his back to the river and his face to the mountains and journeyed on.

Up and over the Backbone-of-the-World went Many Swans. Above the peaks of solitude hang the winds of all directions, and because there are a multitude of winds they can hold fire and turn it. Therefore Many Swans felt leaves once more about his face, and the place was kind to his eyes

with laurels, and quaking aspens, and honeysuckle-trees. All the bushes and flowers were talking, but it was not about Many Swans. The oaks boasted of their iron sinews: "Fire is a plaything, a ball to be tossed and flung away," and they rustled their leaves and struck their roots farther into the moist soil. The red firs stirred at the challenge: "In Winter your leaves are dry," they called to the oaks, "then the fire-bear can eat you. But our leaves are never dry. They are whips to sting the lips of all fires." But the cedars and the pines said nothing, for they knew that nobody would believe them if they spoke.

Now when the hemlocks ran away from him, and the cold rocks glittered with snow, Many Swans knew that he stood at the peak of the world, and again the longing for men came upon him. "I will descend into a new country," he said. "I will be very careful not to swing the sacred implement,

truly it kills people so that they have no time to escape." He thought he could do it, he believed himself, and he knew no rest because of his quest for men.

There was no way to find, but Many Swans went down through the firs, and the yellow pines, and the maples, to a white plain which ran right, and left, and forward, with only a steep sky stopping it very far off; and the sun on the plain was like molten lead pressing him down and his tongue rattled with thirst. So he lifted himself against the weight of the sun and wished a great wish for men and went on, with his desire sobbing in his heart.

To the North was sand, to the East was sand, to the West was sand, to the South was sand, and standing up out of the sand the great flutes of the cactus-trees beckoned him, and flung their flowers

out to tempt him — their wax-white flowers, their magenta flowers, their golden-yellow flowers perking through a glass-glitter of spines; all along the ridges of the desert they called to him and he knew not which way to turn. He asked a humming-bird in a scarlet trumpet-flower, and the humming-bird answered: "Across the sunset to the Red Hills." The sun rose and set three times, and again he knew not where to go, so he asked a gilded flicker who was clicking in a giant cactus. And the flicker told him: "Across the sunset to the Red Hills." But when, after many days, he saw no hills, he thought "The birds deceived me," and he asked a desert lily: "Where shall I find men?" And the lily opened her green-and-blue-veined blossom, and discovered the pure whiteness of her heart. "Across the desert to the Red Hills," she told him, and he believed her, and, on the ninth morning after, he saw the hills, and they

were heliotrope and salmon, and as the sun lifted, they were red, and when the sun was in the top of the sky, they were blood scarlet. Then Many Swans lay and slept, for he did not wish to reach the hills at nightfall lest the people should take him for an enemy and kill him.

* * *

In the morning, Many Swans got up and made haste forward to the hills, and soon he was among cornfields, and the rows of the cornfields were newly plowed and from them there came a sound of singing. Then Many Swans felt the fear come upon him because of the thing he loathed and yet carried, and he thought: "If it should kill these people!" The music of the song was so beautiful that he shed tears, but his fears overcame his longing, for already he loved these people who sang in cornfields at dawn. Many Swans hid in

a tuft of mesquite-bushes and listened, and the words the people were singing were these, but the tune was like a sun wind in the tree-of-green-sticks:

The white corn I am planting,
The white seed of the white corn.
The roots I am planting,
The leaves I am planting,
The ear of many seeds I am planting,
All in one white seed.
    Be kind! Be kind!

The blue corn I am planting.
The blue ear of the good blue corn.
I am planting tall rows of corn.
The bluebirds will fly among my rows,
The blackbirds will fly up and down my rows,

The humming-birds will be there between
my rows,
Between the rows of blue corn I am planting.

Beans I am planting.
The pod of the bean is in the seed.
I tie my beans with white lightning to bring
the thunder,
The long thunder which herds the rain.
I plant beans.
Be kind! Be kind!

Squash-seeds I am planting
So that the ground may be striped with
yellow,
Horizontal yellow of squash-flowers,
Horizontal white of squash-flowers,
Great squashes of all colours.
I tie the squash plants with the rainbow

Which carries the sun on its back.
I am planting squash-seeds.
    Be kind! Be kind!

Out of the South, rain will come whirling;
And from the North I shall see it standing
  and approaching.
I shall hear it dropping on my seeds,
Lapping along the stems of my plants,
Splashing from the high leaves,
Tumbling from the little leaves.

I hear it like a river, running — running —
Among my rows of white corn, running —
  running —
I hear it like a leaping spring among my blue
  corn rows,
I hear it foaming past the bean sprouts,
I hear water gurgling among my squashes.

Descend, great cloud-water,
Spout from the mouth of the lightning,
Fall down with the overturning thunder.
For the rainbow is the morning
When the sun shall raise us corn,
When the bees shall hum to the corn-blossom,
To the bean-blossom,
To the straight, low blossoms of the squashes.

Hear me sing to the rain,
To the sun,
To the corn when I am planting it,
To the corn when I am gathering it,
To the squashes when I load them on my back.
I sing and the god-people hear,
They are kind.

When the song was finished, Many Swans knew that he must not hurt this people. He swore, and

even upon the sacred and terrible thing itself, to make them his safe keeping. Therefore when they returned up the trail to the Mesa, he wandered in the desert below among yellow rabbit-grass and grey iceplants, and visited the springs, and the shrines full of prayer-sticks, and his heart distracted him with love so that he could not stay still.

That night he heard an elf owl calling from a pinyon-tree, and he went to the owl and sought to know the name of this people who sang in the fields at dawn. The owl answered: "Do not disturb me, I am singing a love-song. Who are you that you do not know that this is the land of Tusayan." And Many Swans considered in himself: "Truly I have come a long way."

Four moons Many Swans abode on the plain, eating mesquite-pods and old dried nopals, but he kept

away from the Mesa lest the thing he had with him should be beyond his strength to hold.

* * *

Twixt this side, twixt that side,
Twixt rock-stones and sage-brush,
Twixt bushes and sand,
Go the snakes a smooth way,
Belly-creeping,
Sliding faster than the flash of water on a bluebird's wing.

Twixt corn and twixt cactus,
Twixt springside and barren,
Along a cold trail
Slip the snake-people.
Black-tip-tongued Garter Snakes,
Olive-blue Racer Snakes,
Whip Snakes and Rat Snakes,

Great orange Bull Snakes,

And the King of the Snakes,

With his high rings of scarlet,

His high rings of yellow,

His double high black rings,

Detesting his fellows,

The Killer of Rattlers.

Rattle — rattle — rattle —

Rattle — rattle — rattle —

The Rattlers,

The Rattlesnakes.

Hiss-s-s-s!

Ah-h-h-!

White Rattlesnakes,

Green Rattlesnakes,

Black-and-yellow Rattlesnakes,

Barred like tigers

Soft as panthers.

Diamond Rattlesnakes

All spotted,
Six feet long
With tails of snow-shine.
And most awful,
Heaving wrongwise,
The fiend-whisking
Swift Sidewinders.
Rattlesnakes upon the desert
Coiling in a clump of greasewood,
Winding up the Mesa footpath.
Who dares meet them?
Who dares stroke them?
Who dares seize them?
Rattle — rattle — rattle —
Rattle — rattle — hiss-s-s!

They dare, the men of Tusayan. With their eagle-whips, they stroke them. With their sharp bronze hands, they seize them. Run — run — up the

Mesa path, dive into the kiva. The jars are ready, drop in the rattlers — Tigers, Diamonds, Sidewinders, drop in Bull Snakes, Whip Snakes, Garters, but hang the King Snake in a basket on the wall, he must not see all these Rattlesnakes, he would die of an apoplexy.

They have hunted them toward the four directions. Toward the yellow North, the blue West, the red South, the white East. Now they sit by the sand altar and smoke, chanting of the clouds and the four-coloured lightning-snakes who bring rain. They have made green prayer-sticks with black points and left them at the shrines to tell the snake-people that their festival is here. Bang! Bang! Drums! And whirl the thunder-whizzers!

"Ho! Ho! Ho! Hear us!
Carry our words to your Mother.
We wash you clean, Snake Brothers.
We sing to you.

We shall dance for you.

Plead with your Mother

That she send the white and green rain,

That she look at us with the black eyes of the lightning,

So our corn-ears may be double and long,

So our melons may swell as thunder-clouds

In a ripe wind.

Bring wind!

Bring lightning!

Bring thunder!

Strip our trees with blue-rain arrows.

Ho-Ho-hai! Wa-ha-ně."

Bang! Bang!

Over the floor of the kiva squirm the snakes, fresh from washing. Twixt this side, twixt that side, twixt toes and twixt ankles, go the snakes a smooth way, and the priests coax them with their eagle-feather whips and turn them always back-

ward. Rattle — rattle — rattle — snake-tails threshing a hot air. Whizz! Clatter! Clap! Clap! Corn-gourds shaking in hard hands. A band of light down the ladder, cutting upon a mad darkness.

Cottonwood kisi flickering in a breeze, little sprigs of cotton-leaves clapping hands at Hopi people, crowds of Hopi people waiting in the Plaza to see a monstrous thing. Houses make a shadow, desert is in sunshine, priests step out of kiva.

Antelope priests in front of the kisi, making slow leg-motions to a slow time. Turtle-shell knee-rattles spill a double rhythm, arms shake gourd-rattles, goat-toes; necklaces — turquoise and sea-shell — swing a round of clashing. Striped lightning Antelopes waiting for the Snake Priests. Red-kilted Snake Priests facing them, going forward and back, coming back and over, waving the snake-

whips, chanting a hundred ask-songs. Go on, go back — white — black — red blood-feather, white breath-feather, little cotton-leaf hands clap — clap — He is at the flap of the kisi, they have given him a spotted rattlesnake. Put him in the mouth, kiss the Snake Brother, fondle him with the tongue.

Tripping on a quick tune, they trot round the square. Rattle — rattle — goat-toes, turtle-shells, snake-tails. Hiss, oily snake-mouths; drip, wide priest-mouths over the snake-skins, wet slimy snake-skins. "Aye-ya-ha! Ay-ye-he! Ha-ha-wa-ha! Oway-ha!" The red snake-whips tremble and purr. Blur, Plaza, with running priests, with streaks of snake-bodies. The Rain-Mother's children are being honoured. They must travel before the setting of the sun.

* * *

When the town was on a roar with dancing, Many Swans heard it far down in the plain, and he could not contain his hunger for his own kind. He felt very strong because the cool of sundown was spreading over the desert. He said, "I need fear nothing. My arms are grown tough in this place, my hands are hard as a sheep's skull. I can surely control this thing," and he set off up the path to ease his sight only, for he had sworn not to discover himself to the people. But when he turned the last point in the road, the thing in his hands shook, and said: "We shall strike that town."

Many Swans was strong, he turned and ran down the Mesa, but, as he was running, a priest passed him carrying a handful of snakes home. As the priest went by him, the thing in Many Swans' hand leapt up, and it was the King Snake. It was all ringed with red and yellow and black flames. It

hissed, and looped, and darted its head at the priest and killed him. Now when the priest was dead, all the snakes he was holding burst up with a great noise and went every which way, twixt this side, twixt that side, twixt upwards, twixt downwards, twixt rock-stone and bunch-grass. And they were little slipping flames of hot fire. They went up the hill in fourteen red and black strings, and they were the strings of blood and death. The snakes went up a swift, smooth way, and Many Swans went up with them for he was mad. He beat his hands together to make a drum, and shouted "Break! Break! Break! Break!" And he thought it was the priests above singing a new song.

Many Swans reached the town, but the fire-snakes were running down all the streets. They struck the people so that they died, and the bodies took fire and were consumed. The house windows were

hung with snakes who were caught by their tails and swung down, vomiting golden stars into the rain-gutters. In one of the gutters was a blue salvia plant, and as Many Swans passed, it nodded and said "Alas! Alas!" It reminded Many Swans of the flax-flowers in the sky, and his senses came back to him and he tore his clothes and his hair and cried "Ka! Ka! Ka! Ka!" a great many times. Then he beat himself on the sharp rocks and tried to crush the thing he had, but he could not; he tried to split it, but it did not split.

Many Swans saw that he was alone in the world. He lifted his eyes to the thing and cursed it, then he ran to hurl himself over the cliff. Now a boulder curled into the path and, as he turned its edge, The-One-Who-Walks-All-Over-the-Sky stood before him. Her eyes were moons for sadness, and her voice was like the coiling of the sea. She said to him: "I tried to love you; I tried to be kind to

your people; why do you cry? You wished for it."

She took it off him and left him.

Many Swans looked at the desert. He looked at the dead town. He wept.

# FUNERAL SONG
# FOR THE INDIAN CHIEF BLACKBIRD

### Buried Sitting Upright on a Live Horse on a Bluff Overlooking the Missouri River

He is dead,
Our Chief.
Ai! Ai! Ai! Ai!
Our Chief
On whom has fallen a sickness,
He, our Leader,
Who has grievously died.

At his feet we are gathered,
Warriors, his children,
We have cut our flesh
Before his body.
Our blood drips on the willow-leaves,

The willows with which we have pierced our arms.
We beat the willow-sticks,
We mourn our Brother, our Father,
We chant slow songs
To the listening spirit of the great Chief
Blackbird.

Yesterday,
When the sky was red
And the sun falling through it,
They called to you,
Your ancestors,
From the middle of the sky;
From a cloud, circling above you,
They pronounced your name.

He is dead,
Our Leader.
Ai! Ai! Ai! Ai!

Our Chief, Blackbird.
Beat the willow-sticks,
Let our blood drop before him.

You have sung your death-song,
To your friends you have sung it,
To the grasses of the prairie,
To the river,
Cutting the prairie
As the moon cuts the sky.

See, we lift you,
The blood of our willow-wounds drops upon you.
We dress you in your shirt of white buckskin,
We fasten your leggings of mountain-goat skin,
We lay upon your shoulders
Your robe of the skin of a young buffalo bull.
We clasp your necklace of grizzly bears' claws
About your neck.

We place upon your head

Your war-bonnet of eagle plumes.

All this you have commanded.

Ai! Ai! Ai! Ai!

Strike the willow-sticks.

You shall depart

From among us.

It is time for you to depart,

You are going on a long journey.

Up to the tall cliff

We carry you.

Our blood drips upon the ground.

And your horse,

Your white horse,

Goes with you.

He follows you.

Softly we lead him

After your body,

After your not heavy body
Shrunken in death.

The hawk is flying
Halfway up the sky.
So will you be halfway above the earth.
On the high bluff
You are standing.
The ground trembles
As we place you upon it.

You are dead,
But you hear our songs.
You are dead,
But we lift you on your White Weasel Horse.
He trembles as the earth trembles.
His skin quivers
At the loose touch of your knees.
Ai! Ai! Ai! Ai!

Leader of the Warriors
To the spirit land you are going.
Our blood cries to you,
Dropping upon the willow-leaves.

Who is this that rides the Wolf Trail at evening?
Blackbird,
Chief of his people.
His bow is in his hand,
Scarlet the heads of his arrows,
The feathers of his shield sweep the ground.
Lift him,
Lift him,
Lift the War Chief
To his light-legged horse.
We will stand,
We will see him,
We shall behold his body
Set high on a high horse,

On his own horse,
His white horse of many battles.
We shall see him
As we desire.

You are bright as the sun among trees,
You are dazzling as the long sun running among the
prairie grasses,
You pierce our eyes as a thunder-cloud rising against
the wind.
Who shall be to us as he,
Our Chief?
Your white horse shivers and is still,
He will carry you safely over the Wolf Trail
To those who are talking about you,
Calling to you to come.

Lay little sods of earth
About the feet of the white horse.

Gather those which contain the seeds
Of camass, and puccoon, and lupin.
Watch that the seeds of the looks-like-a-plume flower
Spread the earth we are laying against his sides,
So that, in the time when the ducks and geese shed
their feathers,
The black breasts may drop from the sky upon them,
singing,
As our blood drops on these sods.

Ai! Ai! Ai! Ai!
Proudly he sits his white horse,
His head-feathers make a noise in the wind.
Great Chief,
Father of people,
Facing the cleft hill,
Facing the long, moving river,
Waiting briefly for the edge of night,
Abiding the coming of the stars,

Poised to leap,

To strike the star-way with the mighty energy

Of your powerful horse,

To take the Wolf Trail with the shout of cunning,

To ride streaming over the great sky.

We watch you,

We exalt you,

We cheer you with our hunting-cries,

Our battle-songs,

To the beating of our willow-sticks you shall ride,

And he, your White Weasel Horse,

Shall bear you above the clouds

To the tepees beyond the star-which-never-moves.

When the waters are calm

And the fog rises,

Will you appear?

Then will come up out of the waters

Your brothers,

The Otters.

From beneath the high hill

Your voice will echo forth.

Your voice shall be as metal

In the spaces of the sky,

Your war club shall resound through the sky.

Like your brothers,

The Eagles,

Your voice shall descend to us

Down the slopes of the wind.

You will go round the world,

You will go over and under the world,

You will come to the Place of Spirits.

Ai! Ai! Ai! Ai!

We are pitying ourselves

That he, our Father, is dead.

He is carried like thunder

Across the sky.

The trees are afraid of the wind,

So are we afraid of the whirlwind of our enemies
Without our Chief to lead us.
When the rain comes
On the wings of crows
In the Spring,
We shall fear even the voice of the owl,
Sitting alone in our lodges
Now that you are gone.

How many the count of your battles!
At night,
When the dogs were still,
Going softly
You would seek the villages of your enemies to destroy
    them.
You who, all night long,
Were standing up until daylight.
You fought as one who dances singing:
"Heh-yeh! Heh-yeh! Heh-yeh! Heh-yeh!

Death I bring!

I dance upon those I kill,

I scalp those I kill,

I laugh above those I kill.

Heh-yeh! Heh-yeh! Heh-yeh! Heh-yeh!"

Your enemies were not able to shoot,

Their bow-strings were wet

And the sinews stretched

And slipped off the ends of the bows.

Your arrows were red

As grasshoppers' wings

When they fly high in the sun.

Your enemies were ashamed before you

Since you cut off their heads

And tied their scalps to your bridle-rein.

Now you journey alone,

Journey along the Wolf Trail

Wearily among the little stars.

Ai! Ai! Ai! Ai!

It is time for you to depart,

You are going on a long journey.

You are going in your shoes.

You cannot travel,

Your feet are weary with many steps,

But your round-hoofed horse shall step for you,

He shall bear you over the trail of stars.

The deer walks alone,

Singing of his shining horns,

So shall you walk

Singing of the great deeds

You have done in this world.

Leader of the Warriors,

Where are you?

We, your children,

Sing a song of five sounds

To your departing spirit.

We sing a song of vermilion,

We stain our hands

And mark the palms of them in red

On the flanks of your horse.

We heap the sods about him,

We hold his head

And stuff his nostrils and ears with earth.

We cover your arms, your shoulders,

Your glittering face,

The feathers flying above your head.

The water-birds will alight upon your body,

We shall see your grave from below,

From the place where the snipe stand above their
shadows in the water.

Ai! Ai! Ai! Ai!

The Morning Star and the Young Morning Star

Are together in the sky above the prairie.

How far have you already gone from us?

Our blood drips slowly,

The wounds are closing,

It is time we pulled out the willow-sprays

And left this place

Before the rising of the sun.

## WITCH-WOMAN

"WITCH!

Witch!

Cursed black heart,

Cursed gold heart striped with black;

Thighs and breasts I have loved;

Lips virgin to my thought,

Sweeter to me than red figs;

Lying tongue that I have cherished.

Is my heart wicked?

Are my eyes turned against too bright a sun?

Do I dazzle, and fear what I cannot see?

It is grievous to lose the heart from the body,

Death which tears flesh from flesh is a grievous thing;

But death is cool and kind compared to this,

This horror which bleeds and kindles,

These kisses shot with poison,

These thoughts cutting me like red knives.

Lord,

Thunderer,

Swift rider on the clashing clouds,

Ruler over brass heavens,

Mighty ruler of the souls of men,

Be merciless to me if I mistake this woman,

As I will be merciless if I learn a bitter truth.

I burn green oil to you,

Fresh oil from fair young olives,

I pour it upon the ground;

As it drips I invoke your clemency

To send a sign.

Witches are moon-birds,

Witches are the women of the false, beautiful moon.

To-night the sign,

Maker of men and gods.

To-night when the full-bellied moon swallows the stars.

Grant that I know.

Then will I offer you a beastly thing and a broken;

Or else the seed of both

To be your messengers and slaves forever,

My sons, and my sons' sons, and their sons after;

And my daughters and theirs throughout the ages

For your handmaidens and bedfellows as you com-

mand.

How the white sword flickers!

How my body twists in the circle of my anguish!

Behold, I have loved this woman,

Even now I cry for her,

My arms weaken,

My legs shake and crumble.

Strengthen my thews,

Cord my sinews to withstand a testing.

Let me be as iron before this thing,

As flashing brass to see,

As lightning to fall;

As rain melting before sunshine if I have wronged the woman.

The red flame takes the oil,

The blood of my trees is sucked into fire

As my blood is sucked into the fire of your wrath and mercy,

O just and vengeful God."

Body touches body. How sweet the spread of loosened bodies in the coil of sleep, but a gold-black thread is between them. An owl calls deep in the wood.

Can you see through the night, woman, that you stare so upon it? Man, what spark do your eyes follow in the smouldering darkness?

She stirs. Again the owl calling. She rises. Foot after foot as a panther treads, through the door — a minute more and the fringes of her goat-skin are brushing the bushes. She pushes past brambles, the briars catch little claws in her goat-skin. And

he who watches? As the tent-lap flaps back, he leaps. The bearer of the white sword leaps, and follows her. Blur of moonshine before — behind. He walks by the light of a green-oil oath, and the full moon floats above them both.

Seeded grass is a pool of grey. Ice-white, cloud-white, frosted with the spray of the sharp-edged moon. Croon — croon — the wind in the feathered tops of the grass. They pass — the witch-white woman with the gold-black heart, the flower-white woman — and his eyes startle, and answer the bow curve of her going up the hill.

The night is still, with the wind, and the moon, and an owl calling.

On the sea side of a hill where the grass lies tilted to a sheer drop down, with the sea splash under as the waves are thrown upon a tooth of rock. Shock and shatter of a golden track, and the black

sucking back. The draw of his breath is hard and cold, the draw of the sea is a rustle of gold.

Behind a curl of granite stone the man lies prone. The woman stands like an obelisk, and her blue-black hair has a serpent whisk as the wind lifts it up and scatters it apart. Witch-heart, are you gold or black? The woman stands like a marble tower, and her loosened hair is a thunder-shower twisted across with lightnings of burnt gold.

Naked and white, the matron moon urges the woman. The undulating sea fingers the rocks and winds stealthily over them. She opens the goat-skin wide — it falls.

The walls of the world are crashing down, she is naked before the naked moon, the Mother Moon, who sits in a courtyard of emerald with six black slaves before her feet. Six — and a white seventh who dances, turning in the moonlight, flinging her

arms about the soft air, despairingly lifting herself to her full height, straining tiptoe away from the slope of the hill.

Witch-breasts turn and turn, witch-thighs burn, and the feet strike always faster upon the grass. Her blue-black hair in the moon-haze blazes like a fire of salt and myrrh. Sweet as branches of cedar, her arms; fairer than heaped grain, her legs; as grape clusters, her knees and ankles; her back as white grapes with smooth skins.

She runs through him with the whipping of young fire. The desire of her is thongs and weeping. She is the green oil to his red flame. He peers from the curl of granite stone. He hears the moan of the crawling sea, and sees — as the goat-skin falls so the flesh falls. . . .

And the triple Heaven-wall falls down, and the Mother Moon on a ruby throne is near as a bow-shot

above the hill.

Goat-skin here, flesh-skin there, a skeleton dancing in the moon-green air, with a white, white skull and no hair. Lovely as ribs on a smooth sand shore, bright as quartz-stones speckling a moor, long and narrow as Winter reeds, the bones of the skeleton. The wind in the rusty grass hums a funeral-chant set to a jig. Dance, silver bones, dance a whirligig in a crepitation of lust. The waves are drums beating with slacked guts. Inside the skeleton is a gold heart striped with black, it glitters through the clacking bones, throwing an inverted halo round the stamping feet.

Scarlet is the ladder dropping from the moon. Liquid is the ladder — like water moving yet keeping its shape.

The skeleton mounts like a great grey ape, and its bones rattle; the rattle of the bones is the crack of

dead trees bitten by frost. The wind is desolate, and the sea moans.

But the ruby chair of Mother Moon shudders, and quickens with a hard fire. The skeleton has reached the last rung. It melts and is absorbed in the burning moon. The moon? No moon, but a crimson rose afloat in the sky. A rose? No rose, but a black-tongued lily. A lily? No lily, but a purple orchid with dark, writhing bars.

Trumpets mingle with the sea-drums, scalding trumpets of brass, the wind-hum changes to a wail of many voices, the owl has ceased calling.

"White sword are you thirsty?
I give you the green blood of my heart.
I give you her white flesh cast from her black soul.
Thunderer,
Vengeful and cruel Father,

God of Hate,

The skins of my eyes have dropped,

With fire you have consumed the oil of my heart.

Take my drunken sword,

Some other man may need it.

She was sweeter than red figs.

O cursed God!"

## THE RING AND THE CASTLE

### A Ballad

"Benjamin Bailey, Benjamin Bailey, why do you
wake at the stroke of three?"
"I heard the hoot of an owl in the forest, and the creak
of the wind in the alder-tree."

"Benjamin Bailey, Benjamin Bailey, why do you
stare so into the dark?"
"I saw white circles twining, floating, and in the centre
a molten spark."

"Why are you restless, Benjamin Bailey? Why do
you fling your arms so wide?"
"To keep the bat's wings from coming closer and push
the grey rat from my side."

"What are you muttering, Benjamin Bailey? The room is quiet, the moon is clear."
"The trees of the forest are curling, swaying, writhing over the heart of my Dear."

"Lie down and cover you, Benjamin Bailey, you're raving, for never a wife or child
Has blessed your hearthstone; it is the fever, which startles your brain with dreams so wild."

"No wife indeed," said Benjamin Bailey, and his blue nails picked at the bed-quilt's edge.
"I gathered a rose in another man's garden and hid it from sight in a hawthorn hedge.

I made her a chamber where green boughs rustled, and plaited river-grass for the floor,
And three times ten moonlight nights I loved her, with my old hound stretching before the door.

Then out of the North a knight came riding, with
crested helm and pointed sword.
'Where is my wife?' said the knight to the people. 'My
wife! My wife!' was his only word.

He tied his horse to the alder yonder, and stooped his
crest to enter my door.
'My wife,' said the knight, and a steel-grey glitter
flashed from his armour across the floor.

Then I lied to that white-faced knight, and told him
the lady had never been seen by me;
And when he had loosed his horse from the alder, I
bore him a mile of company.

I turned him over the bridge to the valley, and waved
him Godspeed in the twilight grey.
And I laughed all night as I toyed with his lady,
clipping and kissing the hours away.

The sun was kind and the wind was gentle, and the
green boughs over our chamber sang,
But on the Eastern breeze came a tinkle whenever the
bells in the Abbey rang.

Dang! went the bell, and the lady hearkened — once,
twice, thrice — and her tears sprang forth.
'"T was three of the clock when I was wedded,' quoth
she, 'in the castle to the North.

They praised us for a comely couple, in truth my Lord
was a joy to see;
I gave him my troth for a golden dowry, and he gave
me this ring on the stroke of three.

Three years I lived with him fair and stately, and then
we quarrelled, as lovers will.
He swore I wed for his golden dowry, and I that he
loved another still.

I knew right well that never another had crossed the
heart of my dearest Lord,
But still my rage waxed hot within me until, one
morning, I fled abroad.

All down the flickering isles of the forest I rode till at
twilight I sat me down,
And there a-weeping you found and took me, as one
lifts a leaf which the wind has blown.

But to-night my ring burns hot on my finger, and my
Lord's face shines through the curtained door.
And the bells beat heavy against my temples, two long
strokes, and one stroke more.

Loose me now, for your touch is terror, my heart is a
hollow, my arms are wind;
I must go out once more and wander, seeking the
forest for what I shall find.'

Then I fell upon her and stifled her speaking till the
bells died away in the rustling breeze,
And so I held her dumb until morning with smothered
lips, but I knew no ease.

And every night that the bells came clearly striking
three strokes, like a heavy stone
I would seal her lips, but even as I kissed her, behind
her clenched teeth I could hear her moan.

The nights grew longer, I had the lady, her pale blue
veins and her skin of milk,
But I might have been clasping a white wax image
straightly stretched on a quilt of silk.

Then curdled anger foamed within me, and I tore at
her finger to take the ring,
The red gold ring which burned her spirit like some
bewitched, unhallowed thing.

High in the boughs of our leafy chamber, the lady's
sorrowing died away.
All night I fought for the red gold circle, all night, till
the oak-trees reddened to day.

For two nights more I strove to take it, the red gold
circlet, the ring of fear,
But on the third in a blood-red vision I drew my sword
and cut it clear.

Severed the ring and severed the finger, and slew my
Dear on the stroke of three;
Then I dug a grave beneath the oak-trees, and buried
her there where none could see.

I took the ring and the bleeding finger, and sent a mes-
senger swiftly forth,
An amazing gift to my Lord I sent them, in his lonely
castle to the North.

He died, they say, at sight of my present. I laughed
when I heard it — 'Hee! Hee! Hee!'
But every night my veins run water and my pores
sweat blood at the stroke of three."

"Benjamin Bailey, Benjamin Bailey, seek repentance,
your time is past."
"My Dearest Dear lies under the oak-trees, pity
indeed that the ring held fast."

"Benjamin Bailey, Benjamin Bailey, sinners repent
when they come to die."
"Toll the bell in the Abbey tower, and under the oak-
trees let me lie."

## GAVOTTE IN D MINOR

She wore purple, and when other people slept
She stept lightly — lightly — in her ruby powdered
slippers
Along the flags of the East portico.
And the moon slowly rifting the heights of cloud
Touched her face so that she bowed
Her head, and held her hand to her eyes
To keep the white shining from her. And she was
wise,
For gazing at the moon was like looking on her own
dead face
Passing alone in a wide place,
Chill and uncosseted, always above
The hot protuberance of life. Love to her
Was morning and a great stir
Of trumpets and tire-women and sharp sun.

As she had begun, so she would end,
Walking alone to the last bend
Where the portico turned the wall.
And her slipper's sound
Was scarce as loud upon the ground
As her tear's fall.
Her long white fingers crisped and clung
Each to each, and her weary tongue
Rattled always the same cold speech:
    Gold was not made to lie in grass,
    Silver dints at the touch of brass,
    The days pass.

Lightly, softly, wearily,
The lady paces, drearily
Listening to the half-shrill croon
Leaves make on a moony Autumn night
When the windy light
Runs over the ivy eerily.

A branch at the corner cocks an obscene eye
As she passes — passes — by, and by —
A hand stretches out from a column's edge,
Faces float in a phosphorent wedge
Through the points of arches, and there is speech
In the carven roof-groins out of reach.
A love-word, a lust-word, shivers and mocks
The placid stroke of the village clocks.
Does the lady hear?
Is any one near?
She jeers at life, must she wed instead
The cold dead?
A marriage-bed of moist green mold,
With an over-head tester of beaten gold.
A splendid price for a splendid scorn,
A tombstone pedigree snarled with thorn
Clouding the letters and the fleur-de-lis,
She will have them in granite for her heart's chill ease.

I set the candle in a draught of air
And watched it swale to the last thin flair.
They laid her in a fair chamber hung with arras,
And they wept her virgin soul.
The arras was woven of the story of Minos and
Dictynna.
But I grieved that I could no longer hear the shuffle of
her feet along the portico,
And the ruffling of her train against the stones.

## THE STATUE IN THE GARDEN

### I

It was not a large garden, as gardens go,
But carefully patterned with row after row
Of flower-beds edged by low, clipped box
In the quaintly prim and orthodox
Manner of seventeen-eighty or thereabouts.
A couple of dolphins spurted out spouts
Of silver-blue water from a couple of fountains,
And the distant sky was suggestive of mountains.
I say suggestive, for it lay with the wind
If the sky were thicker or thinner skinned.
Even when the air was without a vapour
All one saw was a luminous blur
Which might have been a cloud or a trick
Of the eyes, smarting under the too sharp prick
Of the very clearness, till you looked again

And saw it still. It was never plain,
But hung like a whisper of something bright
In the large, slow blue, about half the height
From horizon to zenith. This dolomite
Which, for better disguise, I shall call Ghost Peak,
Was considered by Julius to be the unique
Cause of his coming, and presently buying,
The charming old house he was now occupying.
A writer may live where his fancies dictate
Provided his copy be kept up to date,
And Julius had certainly earned some repose
And might, if he wanted, play dominoes,
Or whist, or billiards, for the rest of his life,
Might even consider the taking a wife.
Not Julius, he sought only lapses of hours
Within reach of the sight and scent of flowers.
He loved the languor of faded chintz,
The strange nostalgia of coloured prints
To hang above Sheraton chairs, the sham

And exquisite classics of the brothers Adam.
His garden delighted him through and through,
With its peacocks and unicorns clipped in yew,
And the broad lines of the gravel walks,
Firm and flat between tall stalks
Of fox-glove, or monk's-hood, down which to betake
Himself to the edge of the long green lake
Which lay at the foot of the garden-close —
And over all the Ghost Peak rose.
On the days when it did; when it did.n't, he fought
A weird depression which clenched his thought
And seemed to squeeze it between cold claws.
He harried his soul in a search for laws
Of the bonds of man with things, the caress
Of awe and horror in loveliness.
He burned his brain in a search to find
What the Ghostly Mountain meant to his mind,
What his chairs and tables held him by,
Whether or not he had heard a sly

Rustle, as he passed, from the peacock yews.
Once he thought that the cockatoos
On the chintz of his arm-chair flapped their wings.
These were most fearful and joyous things.
The mellow place had a sort of spell,
And it suited him thoroughly, blissfully well.
He was tired out with the old routine
Of man and man, now something between
Held him away and apart. Intense
Became his ultra-commonsense,
And he was happy and preened himself
On being an unusual sort of elf,
Not feeling the need of his fellows at all.
Julius was riding for a fall.

One day his luck, or his fate, or his fiend,
(Something sardonic, at least) intervened
Between him and the comfortable life he was leading,
And suggested a walk in the town. Too much reading

Had made his head buzz, so he put on his hat
And started out blithely, considering that
This bright afternoon was an excellent season
To visit a shop he had not, for some reason,
Yet entered. An antiquity dealer's, of course.
Such gentry, he mused, were the clear single source
Of his pleasures. How gaily he walked down the street!
I might almost say strutted, so very replete
Was he with good temper. The shop-door stood wide,
And Julius, poor devil, stepped squarely inside.

## II

The place was dim, with shafts of dusty light
Shocking the gloom to colour. On the right,
A grim old cabinet whose worm-holed wood
Was black as iron, reared its vastitude
Quite out of sight among the smoky rafters.
Its front was carven with the grinning laughters
Of broken-faced, libidinous dwarfs who clung

Among the twistings of a snaky tongue
That proved itself a vine by flinging clusters
Of grapes out here and there, which, through the dust
blurs,
Shimmered with subtle, polished, purple lustres.
The thing was most intriguing, harsh, and fine,
But like a thunder-cloud which breaks the line
Of open clearness in a Summer sky.
Worm-eaten oak could scarcely qualify
Among his painted satin-wood escritoires,
His Wedgwood vases and majolicas.
"The eighteenth century is my period,"
He told the shopman, who answered with a nod,
And forthwith guided him among the maze
Of torn brocaded chairs, the chipping glaze
Of things which once were lacquer, and the traps
Of sprawling andirons with trivets on their laps,
Into a little yard behind the shop
All full of urns, and columns, and a crop

Of marble Mercuries, and Venuses, and Floras,
Of cavaliers in *bautas* and black-silk-masked signoras.
The shopman waved his hand and turned away.

Well, Julius, take your stock of the array,
But never again can there be yesterday
As you will recollect, I dare to say,
Though sportsmen keep stiff upper lips and pay.

The things were well enough at five yards distance
But at a closer view did not entrance.
Julius, discouraged, was turning to go in
When some conceit of colour, vaguely seen
Between two statues, struck his eager sense
And set him threading through the very dense
Concourse of mediocre marbles. Suddenly
She, charming feminine creature, held his eye.
The seeing was a dazzle in his head,
But what he saw by every honest measure

Had not this shimmering denied him leisure
To contemplate beyond his eager pleasure,
Was just a garden figure made of lead.

A garden figure. Yes, but what a one!
Bright as a flower under a white sun,
Vigorous and frail, with tints as gay as those
Which deck the saints in Fra Angelico's
Best adorations. Dressed in pink and blue,
A rose-red bodice, whence a kerchief flew
Streaming behind her on a hidden wind,
Her azure skirt was gathered up and pinned
A little to one side, her stockings shone
As though of very silk, and she had on
The blackest, shiniest pair of buckled shoes
That ever bore a maiden through the dews
Of a Summer morning. Then there was her hat
Of yellow straw, beribboned, wide, and flat.
Her face and hands were all that hands and face

Might be in hue and shapeliness, their grace
A balance of perfections. At her belt,
In her up-curving arm, she held a nosegay
Of marigolds and phlox, the lively way
In which these flowers were modelled made a play
Of movement seem among them, and the scent
Just on the point of coming — yes, Julius smelt
Their pungent bitter sweetness as he bent
A little farther forward, then it went
Fading away, and Julius could have sworn
The lady smiled a little more. Was it scorn
Or only the shadow from the maple-tree?
What was it Julius saw or did n't see?
He scarcely stopped to wonder. Back he hurried
Into the shop, and though a trifle flurried
Achieved a tolerable bargain, for our hero
Was a shrewd business man, as you must know.
Well, that was done, the figure to be delivered.
Did Julius hear a rusty sound which quivered

Down the old cabinet, cracking in the heat?
Those grinning dwarfs pursued him to the street,
He felt their obscene jaws stretching and gobbling.
That cabinet was a disgusting thing,
A mouldering carcass which needed burying.
And then he straight forgot it, thinking where,
Beside which tree and close to which parterre,
He should place his little leaden Jardinière.

III

That night the sun sank in a wheel of purple flame.
The Ghost Peak floated, an unapproachable purity, in
the opposite sky.
The lake was a violent splendour with no farther shore.
But Julius had chosen the place for his statue;
He was content to sit on a garden bench and smoke,
And watch the white lilies fuse into incandescence
under the fading of the sky.

At the end of a long vista,
Near, and not too near, a fountain,
Beneath an acacia whose drooping golden chains of
flowers brushed her hat and shoulder,
Stood the little garden maiden,
A gaiety of colour in a green and gold shade.
Her pinks, and blues, and yellows, were like the tink-
ling of glass bells to his senses.
A front foot lightly, firmly advanced,
A back foot just on its tiptoe,
She paused, waiting a farther reason for coming
forward,
Abiding the final chord of a rhythm not yet completed.
A dancer without music,
A walker without a goal,
Seeking a purpose to fulfil a movement
Unwittingly begun.
Half bold, half shy, and wholly alluring,

Julius congratulated himself on having added to his
garden
Just the touch it needed,
And more than ever, felt no concern to leave it.

Summer!
Summer!
Great gusts of surging Summer,
A breeze of perfume making its own wind!
Butterflies flickered among orange lilies,
Ruby-throated humming-birds drank from climbing
nasturtiums
Hanging in a vanishing whirl of wings.
At night, the garden was a bowl of fire-flies,
And, when the moon rose, the Ghost Peak, suddenly,
silently visible,
Bloomed in the half-height of the sky.
A fire-fly lit on the breast of the statue,
"As it might have been a diamond," thought Julius,

"I had bought for her on Midsummer Day."
He was pleased with the fancy,
And slipped his ring on the finger of the statue
To see it gleam in the moonlight.
Pricks of sapphire, ripples of rose,
Basilisk eyes which open and close,
How the light of the moon ran across the diamond!
How it splashed deep down in the facets of the stone
And flung up sprays of iris and maroon.
Julius played the tale of lover to his dream
Until the moon set,
But when he tried to pull the ring off,
It held instead,
Caught in the crook of a knuckle of lead,
And the white stone was red — red —
And in its heart lay the bright, coiled thread
Of a many-coloured snake with an eye in its head.
And there were grimaces
Of misshapen faces

Peering out of a green snake-tree.

The diamond glittered horribly,

For the eye made a light

Which broke through the night

In a sort of bungling, dazzling flight

That splintered the garden's symmetry:

The trees were so tall

They had no tops at all,

And the lake stood straight like a painted sea.

Then came the dark . . .

And the spark of the scratch

From a lighted match

As Julius sought to take the ring.

But he could not, it continued to cling.

Julius laughed.

"Good night, Madonna del Giardino,"

Said he,

"You may give the jewel back to me

To-morrow."

And he went in to bed.

But not to-morrow,
Or the morrow, or the next,
Could he take off the ring. Julius was perplexed.
It was safe enough, for who would seek gems
On a garden figure's finger, and as all his strata-
gems
Had failed, why Julius left the matter where it was.
In fact, he grew to think of it as
An added touch of coquetry
To the statue's charm, and let it be.

A week or two of amazing weather
He and the statue passed together.
Julius was never more enamoured
Of his quaint old house, but the garden clamoured
With loud throat notes of yellow and red,
An orchestra in every bed,
The blaring brass of late Summer flowers.

In the early morning, the garden's blaze
Was softened by a half-Autumnal haze,
But by noon the colours were deafening.
I am not responsible for the sting
Of such a muddle of metaphors,
They were Julius's, and what was worse
He made many such as he sat by the fountain,
Under the gleam of his Vision, the Mountain,
Playing a game he delighted in:
That his garden lady was feminine
Flesh and blood to his masculine
Desire, a proper person before whom to kneel.
The game as he played it became almost real.
It was well no gardener was hovering round
To overhear poor Julius expound
His love in his best poetic style.
I fear the man might have been tempted to smile,
Or rather, more possibly, since persons so menial
Find everything out of routine uncongenial,

He might even have taken his master for mad;
A condition of things which, I hasten to add,
Was not so. The truth is man is so multiplex
He confuses himself with his this and his that,
And carries round constantly under his hat
A thousand odd notions. Now 't was nothing but sex
Deprived its due reason, which set Julius sighing
Before a lead statue instead of complying
With all mystic wisdom and seeking a woman
Who, whatever she lacked, would be certainly human.

All the long Summer days, and soft Summer nights,
Julius sat by his statue, and sometimes the flights
Of his fancy (or eyesight) made him think he detected
A twitch or a shiver, he almost suspected
She might some day speak. So a month passed away,
Then a veer in the wind brought a cold rainy day.
No sitting and soaking for hours together,
And Julius was in for a real "spell of weather."

Like wires across the landscape fell the rain,
The lean, swift wind became a hurricane,
Leaves rocketed along the air, the lashing trees
Thundered as they drove their quivering knees
Deep in the muddy grass, some leapt and screamed
As a branch broke and left the trunk all seamed
With the running scar. The windows creaked like bones
As the old house raged and tore on its foundation
stones.
Two days the fury lasted, then a smooth
And sudden calm fell with a change of wind,
But still the sky seemed a grey marble veined
With spots and drops of black. Like a broken tooth,
The ancient sycamore stood with its stumps
All hollow to the rainfall. Where were clumps
Of flowers was beaten offal; where were walks
Were spaces littered with the rotting stalks
Of headless plants. Beyond was only mist;

A hatching of water hid the sudden twist
Of the path to the Dolphin Fountain. How was she?
But Julius had no mind to go and see.
He wanted lights, and brick façades, and town,
Somewhere where no leaves were which could be
blown,
A brief half-hour away these might be had,
And Julius sought them eagerly, most glad,
For once, to leave his consoles and clipped yews.
Blood ran again along his dusty thews.

## IV

He could not grasp it,
Could not tear the shell
Off of his soul and see it as it was
Naked and green with life;
Nor could he see what tendrils from it held
Her tendrils. How his heart
Long since burst open with its fruit spilled out,

And so accustomed to a core of air,
Closed round her as a sheath
Fitted to its own kernel.
But these things were.
A month ago he was an amateur of taste,
To-day his footsteps rang like clanging bells,
The steps of self-sufficing, august man,
Beating a chime upon the universe.

A month he had been away, and when he came
Once more into his garden, late September
Lay like a melted hoar-frost on the air.
The flowers were dahlias, marigolds, and phlox,
All spangled with the chilling of the haze.
Julius smiled at them as he recollected,
For were not phlox and marigolds the flowers
His garden lady carried for her nosegay.
He praised himself for buying the little figure,
Hildegarde would like it. Then he turned

The corner by the fountain and there she was,
A dazzling clarity of shape and colour,
For now and then the fountain tossed its spray
A little higher, and lightly spattered her
So that she shone. So did the diamond
Still on her finger.
But Julius was ashamed to see it there
And made a note to have it cut away
If nothing else would free it. He went on
Down to the lake and skipped a stone or two
Across its surface, noted how faint and edgeless
The Mountain was, then went indoors to work.
He worked all day, and in the evening
Sat down to write a line to Hildegarde.

What is that heavy, pungent smell?
Flowers, of course, but not in the room,
There are none in the room. He shut
The window long ago. Again

He smells it, tart and sweet.
"The phlox and marigolds are lovely here,"
He writes, and stops astonished
For phlox and marigolds are what he smells,
And all the windows tightly shut!
He dips his pen, but instantly the scent
Becomes submerging like a drug,
Becomes an ether clogged with dreams.
A step? Could there come a step
Fanning the floor as lightly as a leaf?
Julius startled looks, and all his muscles
Cease to cohere, they run apart like sand.
He cannot move,
He must be drugged, for right before his eyes
Are phlox and marigolds, and they are arranged
In the pattern of the garden lady's nosegay.
He makes himself look up, but it is torture
Even to turn his eyes, and there she is,
Holding out the flowers. "God in Heaven's name!

What is this?" He speaks, but cannot move an inch.
"I love you, Julius," and it is a voice
Brittle and sharp as glass, a crimson glass.
He hears and shudders.
"To whom are you writing, Julius?
Not to me, and you belong to me,
I have your ring, the ring of our betrothal."
Then Julius tears his muscles from the coil
Of their inertia and leaps upon the statue,
Seizing her arm, her hand —
She folds upon him, smothering his face with hers,
Her crimson voice enters his heavy ears. His mouth is
stopped . . .
Oh, God, how loud the ticking of the clock!
How hard the sleep which will not let him wake!
His eyelids are iron doors he cannot lift;
With all his strength he forces them to open.
The clock says eight, and sunlight fills the room.
There is no statue, so he must have dreamed.

But the letter he was writing, Hildegarde's —
There is no letter!

Well, let us leave it there. This is the first time,
And yesterday is a thing without a shape
Broken and scattered.
Can he build to-morrow and find his feet a footing?
Such perchance may be, or otherwise —
A year has many days.

V

He might have thought the thing a dream
And steadied himself by that.
But when a wall dissolves between two worlds
An honest man does not put himself off
With sophistries. Julius was honest.
He played no tricks of thinking,
And never got the chance. She saw to that.
If he went down the garden to the lake,

She'd leave her pedestal and follow him
Pleading in her glassy, tinkling voice
That she was his.
He tried to work. What nonsense!
He could not see his paper, for her arm
Was always there holding out her flowers.
She ran the scale of coquetry, now coddling him
With little Dresden china figure gestures,
Now raging in a heavy leaden fury.
Once she took up his manuscript
And threw it down and stamped upon it,
Then fell to weeping, bunched up on the floor,
All crumpled to a sad humility.
She was very lovely, you remember,
So possibly, if Hildegarde —
And I'm not saying that there were no moments
When he half wished to cross the line
Between the worlds.
It was not much to cross it,

Just leave his bedroom door unlocked at night,
Or spend an Autumn evening by the fountain.
Once done the other world was his,
But not the two.
No man can straddle both and be alive.
And yet he touched the edge, he knew it,
For the sycamore stumps were headless snakes some
evenings
Cut jaggedly across the middle section,
The top half gone.
They jerked half-circles, breaking in the middle
Of a long whip-tail sweep. The movement snapped
directly on the edge
Which kept him in this world. If he should cross
Then he would see the snakes' heads fully winding.
He knew this. Luckily that moment did not come,
At least, not then. Then he would face about
And sternly order the figure to be gone.
When he was fierce like that, she went,

Drooping and tearful underneath the trees,
And that night he was free of her. For other nights
She passed beneath his window, wringing her hands,
Those little hands which kept his diamond,
Or else outside his door moaning and moaning,
Pressing her mouth to the key-hole,
Squeezing herself full length against the door,
Beating her hands upon it. It was anguish
To listen to her sobbing in the night,
And half betrayed himself, I must believe.
It was unbearable, he grew to loathe her,
And loathed her most when most near being conquered,
For fact disports itself with paradox.
He knew her suffering, but hers was single,
His double-darting. And then one afternoon,
Worn out with sleeplessness and struggle, he saw a way
To give her what she wanted and save himself.

She was alone, the only figure
In all the silent garden. She should have a mate,
He would seek her one; and instantly,
Next morning, he escaped, and went to town,
Going directly to the shop
Where he had purchased her.

The bulging, broken faces
Fleered at him with crooked mouths,
With mouths like bloody gashes
Which made red stains on the oak wood,
The black oak wood of the cabinet.
Or was it the sun?
He heard them slobbering words,
He saw the words like smoke
Rising up and wreathing the rafters.
He saw the green snake-tree
Convulsed, contorted, and swaying.
He saw it was his sycamore

As he had never seen it.

The leaves were clapping and sighing,

The leaves and the faces together,

And the long snake boughs with heads

Which swept in terrible circles.

It was like a far-off screaming

Coming through time, not space,

Tenuously coming through time.

"Fool! Fool! Fool!" in a sort of smoky echo,

Drawing from æons of time,

Ending dark and still in the rafters.

And he saw a moon in the rafters

Shaped like the Ghost Peak Mountain,

A moon of copper and crystal,

In the midst of the flowing smoke.

Julius stood stock still, forcing his mind

To balance itself, to gain a solid kind

Of upright thinking. With his will drawn tense
He held it sternly to obedience.
The swirl of smoke subsided, he ceased to hear
The whispering, the faces froze to mere
Grotesque immovable carvings on the doors
Of an old oak cabinet, one among scores,
An excellent specimen. When Julius
Reached to that point and could quite see it thus,
He had, he felt, attained a victory
Over himself, or over the incubi
Which always seemed about to haunt him. So,
Relieved, he called out loudly, "Oh, Hullo!
Is any one here?" At this, the proprietor
Appeared and inquired what Julius had come for.
Easily explained, to find another
Lead statue to match and set off the other.
Again they went into the little yard,
Past the forlorn Greek goddesses who stared
At them with dull, nicked eyeballs grimed with dust,

Gaunt in their marble robes beneath a crust
Of mosses overscoring them like rust;
Past the poor chipped roccoco cavaliers
Mincing their minuets, the gondoliers
Vigorously rowing on the cindered grass.
At length, beyond a crucifix of brass,
The proprietor stopped and pointed. There it was,
The very thing, exactly the right size,
A little manikin in a gardener's guise,
With yellow breeches and a purple coat;
His loose white shirt was open at the throat,
And he was idly leaning on a scythe.
A springy fellow, well set up and lithe,
Some rustic gallant decades and decades dead
Achieved an immortality of lead.
The thing was done, the garden lady mated,
The shopman more than amply compensated.
And Julius, charmed with his expedient,
Passed through the shop, so happily intent

Upon his ruse he did not look at all
At the old black cabinet against the wall.
Is it better to see, or not to see? A question
Weighty as Hamlet's. This time no suggestion
Of anything untoward struck his sense.
He preened himself upon his sapience.

Most appropriate and pleasing,
The little purple-coated gentleman
Stood between a clipped peacock and a clipped uni-
corn,
An engaging bit of colour beside the achromatic yews.
He leant on his scythe,
Agreeably regarding the little lady across the path.
The Dolphin of the fountain appeared unconcerned,
He spat out his jet of silver-blue water as usual,
But then this was half-past four in the afternoon,
And the sun was very bright in the sky,
The sun which lit this world and not the other.

It was after it had set that things —
But Julius had installed his panacea,
And he went down to the lake to skip stones.
Even when twilight came, he was unmolested.
"So much for that," thought Julius.
But he went back to the house a roundabout way
nevertheless.

## VI

Tap! Tap! Tap! The sound of those buckled shoes!
The little stealthy noise hurt his ears like a bruise.
Three days she had not come, and he had been so sure
The spell was broken, even had found himself content
To relinquish the shadowy dawn of something im-
permanent,
The vague and twilit edges which seemed to circum-
fuse
The real, and sometimes almost suck it or melt it
away.

Had it been pleasure or pain? Julius could not say.
He had taken his stand on the solid when he bought the
little man.
Tap! Tap! on the gravel, the footsteps came — they
came.
And each was like a crack in his smooth and perfect
plan.
Why did she come now, after three days of waiting?
It was he who was eager to ask an explanation.
She came in swiftly and knelt with her marigolds and
phlox
Held quivering out before her in a sort of supplication.
"For you, dear Julius," she said. He brushed by the
evasion.
"Why?" he demanded, ironically conscious of the
parodox,
The question sounded as if he had breathlessly
watched the clocks

And counted the moments of absence. She took it so
at once,
And with a certain majesty of loving stepped swiftly
forward.
What was his response?

Julius, Julius, are you man or superman?
Can you pass the nether space
And keep a clue for returning?
As you stand in the flesh,
This woman, this leaden woman,
What is she that her wooing has at once the grace of
flowers
And the horror of serpents?

Beware, Julius, and look
Through the window, someone is there,
And moonlight striking on the sharp hook
Of a scythe in the blue night air.

The face is sinister which you thought so debonair,
And the eyes are blood-grapes staring at the little
Jardinière,
And at you also, Julius.
His leaden heart is green, green as an unripe pear,
For jealousy and hate is a choking thong in his
throat —
Her beautiful, beautiful mouth, her sucking, intolera-
ble mouth!
Julius feels his head throb, his stifled arteries bloat.
He is the tide of a sea, the thunder about to break,
With all his strength, he bursts himself awake
And flees up the stair.
The long, thin vapours of the nether space
Are closing down as he mounts the stair.
He feels a tenuous, flaccid air
Puffing against his upturned face.
The walls of the rooms are spinning and whirling,
The tables, with legs in the air, are curling

Round and round like hoops on their polished edges.
Unfastened curtains are flaring and furling
And racketing over the window-ledges.
A chiffonier glides across the floor
And catches at him with a golden claw.
Fire leaps from the seats of the chairs;
The flames break off and float like hairs.
The feathers of the red chintz cockatoos
Are burning convolvuli of reds and blues.
Through the heat
Comes the awful beat
Of running — running leaden feet.
Panting and moaning, her little hands
Clutching and pulling at the air, the strands
Of her shredded petticoat dabbed with blood,
She follows Julius, the Gardener behind
Runs with a frothy, scarlet cud
Oozing out of his mouth. His hair is twined
With blotched and broken maple-leaves;

His arms below his rolled-up sleeves
Are hairy as apes; his scythe is a tongue
Whimpering for flesh. Julius has swung
Out of the window, he drops to the ground.
She, with the curve of a springing hound,
Is after; and the Gardener, flung on a bound
Like a bladder projected into light air,
Is next, and running with the others there.

Above in the gurgling trees-tops
Are whispering, misty mouths
Slobbering words like lava
Spilling them down the stems.
The mouths bleed words which drip
Into crawling slimy pools
And seep away like worms
Through the slit and cringing grass-blades.
Man-high is pausing stillness,
But the tree-leaves are whistling and crying

With pallid childish voices.
A screaming comes out of the distance,
An old dead agony wailing,
The anguish of frozen planets
Engulfed in a timeless whirling.
No ear can catch it and hold it,
It hangs beyond hearing, a sense
Of sound aching into the flesh,
Never there; never quite silent.
The sycamore stumps are completed
Into white and hovering snakes
Which glitter and gloom like silver
And wave in a pattern of circles
Perpetually turning and coiling.
The peacocks and unicorns,
With the faces of men and women,
Dance with the blue-black dolphins
Or bathe themselves in the fountains.
They tear off their feathers and skin,

And stand up as golden figures
With red mouths, and red ears; their bellies
Are round and polished as brass,
In the centre of each is a diamond.
They sing, and gambol, and roll,
And pelt one another with flowers,
With marigolds and phlox,
And dash them into the fountain.
The Ghost Peak lies like a wound
In a puckered purple sky,
Sharp cut out of copper and crystal.
It throws a light on the garden
And streaks it with terrible shadows.
Through the shadows, in the glare of the copper
light,
Goes Julius.
His breath scalds his lungs,
His feet stick and cling upon the gravel,
Behind him he hears the feet of the leaden figures

Nearer, louder, shattering his ears,
Confusing his steps with the rhythm of theirs.
His tongue is a red-hot ball in his mouth,
His lungs labour as though under sand.
The peacocks and unicorns skip round him,
They form a ring and dance before him,
Ogling him, thrusting upon him,
Strewing the ground with the diamonds plucked from
    their bellies.
Before him lies the lake,
Shuddering in sharp angles of copper and crystal.
He flogs his lungs, his feet,
He sees only the lake between the dancing unicorns
    and peacocks.
He hurls himself against the twined arms
And breaks through them.
He leaps, with a last pulse of effort,
Into the lake.
Water rises and blinds him,

Copper-flaming water like a great wall crushes upon
    him.
As he sinks — A clap! — loud and reverberant as
    thunder.
Another clap! And a cleft wave rises to left and right,
Hangs a moment asunder,
And falls together with a noise of breaking crystals.
The Ghost Peak explodes
And tumbles in bloody atoms down the sky . . .

## VII

Through quiet water, riffled by the moon,
Julius swims, toward the silent wharves
Of the little village. He hears the gentle grind
Of rowboats against the wharf-sides,
Reaches one and clambering into it feels for the
    gunwale
And then the bow and painter. He pulls the painter,
Hand over hand, until his fingers touch

The seamed wood of the wharf. Then, rising up,
He steps ashore as the boat rocks away.
A striking clock reminds him of the hour.
It is five o'clock. Already above the roofs
The sky is tinted, but there are still some stars
Like diamonds — Oh, damnable allusion!
Like diamonds! — A slightly twisted smile
Twitches his face. And now he sees but one,
Rayless and small, immensely bright to keep
Itself a sparkle in the coloured sky.
He sees it as the spectre of a death
Which might have been, eyeing the resurrection
Which is. Thank God! Now he can watch it fade
Beneath the creeping daylight — just a star,
Going out in the morning. Stars are worlds;
But what has he to do with other worlds
Who knows so blunderingly of this? Well then
What's to do in this world? There's Hildegarde —
With which beginning he finds it is the end,

And other things superfluous. Why return?
Why not start here directly where he stands?
He will go to town, and after Hildegarde
(He feels no qualm at seeing Hildegarde,
Some things are certain, Hildegarde is one),
Call at his agent's and give him strict instructions
To sell his house and all his furniture
At once. He has a written inventory.
It is correct except for two lead figures,
Small garden figurines of no great value,
Fallen into the lake by accident
And much too heavy to think of salvaging.
This plausible fiction happily invented,
The rising sun projected his sudden shadow
Before him on an earth of gold. Which noting,
He laughed and marched along the alley whistling
The broom song from the "Sorcerer's Apprentice."

## DRIED MARJORAM

Over the moor the wind blew chill,
And cold it blew on the rounded hill
With a gibbet starting up from its crest,
The great arm pointing into the West
Where something hung
And clanked and swung.

Churchyard carrion, caged four-square
To every wind that furrows the air,
A poor unburied, unquiet thing,
The weighted end of a constant swing.
It clanged and jangled
But always dangled.

Lonely travellers riding by
Would check their horses suddenly
As out of the wind arose a cry
Hoarse as a horn in the weather-eye
    Of sleet at sea
    Blown desperately.

It would rise and fall, and the dissonance
As it struck the shrill of the wind would lance
The cold of ice-drops down the spine
And turn the blood to a clotted brine.
    Then only the hum
    Of the wind would come.

Never a sound but rasping heather
For minute after minute together.
Till once again a wail, long-drawn,
Would slice the night as though it were sawn,
    Cleaving through
    The mist and dew.

Such were the tales the riders told,
Sitting snugly out of the cold
In a wayside inn, with just a nip
Of cherry-brandy from which to sip,
While rafters rattled
And gossips prattled.

Rotted and blackened in its cage,
Anchored in permanent harborage,
Breeding its worms, with no decent clod
To weave it an apron of grassy sod.
But this is no grief,
The man was a thief.

He stole a sheep from a farmer's fold.
He was hungry, he said, and very cold.
His mother was ill and needed food.
The judge took snuff, his attitude
Was gently resigned.
He had not yet dined.

"To be hanged by the neck until you are dead."
That was the verdict. the judge had said.
A sheep had died so why not a man.
The sheep had an owner, but no one can
Claim to own
A man full-grown.

Nobody's property, no one to care,
But some one is sobbing over there.
"Most distressing, I declare,"
Says the judge, "take the woman out on the stair,
And give her a crown
To buy a new gown."

A gown for a son, such a simple exchange!
But the clerk of the court finds it hard to arrange
This matter of sobbing, the fact is the sheep
Was stolen for her, and the woman will weep.
It is most unreasonable.
Indeed, well-nigh treasonable.

Slowly, slowly, his hands tied with rope,
The cart winds up the market slope.
Slowly, slowly, the knot is adjusted.
The tackle-pulleys whine, they are rusted,
But free at a kick —
Run — and hold with a click.

A mother's son, swung like a ham,
Bobbing over the heads of the jam.
A woman has fainted, give her air,
Drag her away for the people stare.
The hanging is done.
No more fun.

Nothing more but a jolting ride.
An ox-cart with a corpse inside,
Creaking through the shiny sheen
Of heather-stalks melted and bathed in green
From a high-set moon.
The heather-bells croon.

Heather below, and moon overhead,
And iron bars clasping a man who is dead.
Shadows of gorse-bushes under him bite
The shimmering moor like a spotted blight.
The low wind chirrs
Over the furze.

Slowly, slowly, panting and weak,
Some one wanders and seems to seek,
Bursting her eyes in the green, vague glare,
For an object she does not know quite where.
Ah, what is that?
A wild moor cat?

It scratches and cries above her head,
But here is no tree, and overspread
With clouds and moon the waste recedes,
And the heather flows like bent sea-weeds
Pushed by an ebb
To an arching web.

Black and uncertain, it rises before
Her dim old eyes, and the glossy floor
At its feet is undulant and specked
With a rhythmic wavering, and flecked
By a reddish smudge
Which does not budge.

Woman, that bundle is your son,
This is the goal your steps have won.
Over the length of the jewelled moor
You have travelled at last to the high-hung door
Of his airy grave,
Which does nothing but wave.

Dripping and dropping, his caged limbs drain,
And the spangled ground has a sticky stain.
She gave him this blood from her own dull veins,
And hers still runs, but her body's pains
Turn back on her now,
And each is a blow.

Iron-shrouded, flapping the air,
Sepulchred without a prayer,
Denied the comfort of bell and book.
Her tortured eyes do nothing but look.
And from flower to flower
The moon sinks lower.

Silver-grey, lavender, lilac-blue,
East of the moor the sun breaks through;
Cracking a bank of orange mist,
It shoulders up with a ruddy twist,
And spears the spires
Of heath with its fires.

Then a lark shoots up like a popgun ball
And turns to a spark and a song, and all
The thrushes and sparrows twitter and fly,
And the dew on the heather and gorse is dry.
But brutal and clear
The gibbet is here.

Slowly, slowly, worn and flagging,
With the grasshoppers jumping in front of her dragging
Feet, the old woman returns to the town.
But the seed of a thought has been deeply sown
In her aching mind,
Where she holds it enshrined.

Nights of moon and nights of dark,
Over the moor-path footsteps. Hark!
It is the old woman whose son is rotting
Above, on the gallows. That shadow blotting
The Western sky
Will be hers by-and-by.

Morning, and evening, and sun, and snow,
Months of weather come and go.
The flesh falls away from the withering bones,
The bones grow loose and scatter like stones.
For the gallows-tree
Shakes windily.

Every night along the path
Which her steps have beaten to a swath
Where heather and bracken dare not spring,
To the clack and grind of the gallows swing,
    The woman stumbles.
    The skeleton crumbles.

Bit by bit, on the ferns and furze,
Drop the bones which now are hers.
Bit by bit, she gathers them up
And carries them home in an old cracked cup.
    But the head remains
    Although its brains

Nourish the harebells and mullein-stalks.
Blow the wind high, the head still balks;
It rolls like an ivory billiard-ball,
But the bars are too close to let it fall.
    Still, God is just,
    And iron may rust.

November comes, this one after ten,
And the stiff bush-branches grate on the fen,
The gibbet jars to the sharp wind-strokes,
And the frazzled iron snarls and croaks.
It blows a gale
With snow and hail.

Two days, three nights, the storm goes on,
And the cage is tossed like a gonfalon
Above a castle, crumpled and slit,
And the frail joints are shattered apart and split.
The fissure gapes,
And the skull escapes.

An ostrich-egg on a bed of fern,
Restlessly rolled by the streams which churn
The leaves, thrust under and forced into
The roots and the mud which oozes through
The empty pockets
Of wide eye-sockets.

Two days, three nights, and the ferns are torn
And scattered in heaps, and the bushes shorn,
And the heather docked of its seeded bells.
But the glittering skull heaves high and swells
Above the dank square
Where the ferns once were.

Hers at last, all, all of hers,
And past her tears the red sun blurs,
Bursting out of the sleeve of the storm.
She brushes a busy, wriggling worm
Away from the head
Of her dearest dead.

The uprooted gibbet, all awry,
Crooks behind her against the sky.
Startled rabbits flee from her feet;
The stems of the bracken smell ripe and sweet.
She pays no heed,
But quickens her speed.

In the quiet evening, the church-bell tolls;
Fishermen wind up their fishing-poles;
Sheep-bells clink in farmstead closes;
A cat in a kitchen window dozes;
And doors are white
With candlelight.

In the old woman's house there is much to do.
Her windows are shuttered, no gleam comes through,
But inside, the lamp-shine strikes on a tub;
She washes, it seems, and her old hands rub
And polish with care
The thing that is there.

Gently, gently, sorting and sifting,
With a little psalm-tune shakily drifting
Across her lips, she works and watches,
Stealing moments in sundry snatches
To note the tick-tock
Of the hanging clock.

Decently, reverently, all displayed
Upon a cloth, the bones are laid.
Oh, the loving, lingering touch
Tenderly pausing on such and such!
A cuckoo flings
From the clock, and sings.

"Cuckoo! Cuckoo!" Eight times over.
Wrap them up in a linen cover.
Take the spade and snuff the lamp.
Put on a cloak for the night is damp.
The door creaks wide,
She steps outside.

All tottering, solemn, eager, slow,
She crawls along. The moon is low
And creeps beside her through the hedge,
Rising at last to peer over the edge
Of the churchyard wall
And brighten her shawl.

The flagstone path taps back to her tread.
She stops to listen, and whispers spread
All round her, hissing from trees and graves.
Before her is movement; something waves.
But she passes on,
The movement is gone.

Blind in the moon the windows shine,
Colourless, glinting, line and line,
The leaded panes are facets and squares
Of dazzle, arched in carven pairs.
Ivy rustles.
A yew-tree justles.

The corner last on the farthest side
Where the church, foreshortened, is heavy-eyed,
For only the chancel lancets pierce
The lichened mullions, designed in tierce,
Whence the sun comes through
Ruby and blue.

This corner is strangled in overgrowth:
Dock-leaves waver like elephants, loath
To move, but willing to flap their ears,
And huge stone blocks like unshaped biers
    Are sprawled among
    Clumps of adder's-tongue.

A bat swoops down and flitters away;
An owl whimpers like a child astray;
The slanting grave-stones, all askew,
Cock themselves obscenely, two and two.
    She stoops and pushes
    Between the bushes.

She lays her bundle on a stone.
Her bleeding hands are cut to the bone
And torn by the spines of thorn and brier.
Her shoulders ache. Her spade in the mire
    Sucks and slimes
    These many times.

Slowly she clears an open space,
Screened behind hollies, where wild vines lace
Their tendrils in angles and fractured turns.
But water is flooding the stems of the ferns.
    Alas for the dead
    Who lie in this bed!

But hanged men have no business where
The ground has been hallowed by chant and prayer.
Even to lie in the putrid seeping
Of consecrate mud is to be in God's keeping,
    And He will forget
    His judgment debt.

Poor lone soul, all palsied and dim,
As she lifts the bones, she quavers a hymn.
Then, as for years she laid him to sleep
In his crib, she sets the bundle deep
    In the watery hole,
    And prays for his soul.

"Rest, lad, now, surely God hears,
He has granted me this for my many tears.
Sleep, my Darling, for you are come
Home at last to stay at home."
But the old voice stops,
And something drops.

They found her dead on a sunny noon,
Clasping the ground, and overstrewn
With decent leaves which had dropped a shroud
All about her. The parson allowed
Custom to waive
In making her grave.

Even the sexton said no word
When something under his shovel stirred,
And the parson read the burial prayer.
He seemed rather husky, but then the air
Was bitter cold.
There was frost on the mold.

# BEFORE THE STORM

## The Legend of Peter Rugg

### I

Over the hill snakes the dusty road, creeping up, and up, in a smother of sandy gravel, heaving the load of itself up against the horizon; a couple of yards of level, then a leap down between powdered barberry bushes; a narrow white line shot like a bolt between bushes and stone walls. It is appallingly still. Not a rustle of the white barberry-leaves, not a single moving stalk of Queen Anne's lace in the field over the wall. The sunshine lies like a flat, hot weight on the hill, a moment ago there were locusts grating in the branches, but not now. The ground is still, and hot to touch; the trees are still, with a hushing of innumerable

leaves; the sky is still; but in the South-west, great thunder-heads push up behind the mountain. A hushing of leaves, and a pushing of big, white clouds, up — up — puffing into wide silver balloons, gathering back into pigeon-grey pleats, up — up — into the hot yellow sky.

There is a shade over the sun, it is fading from yellow to white, from white to grey. Away down the hill is a tight, narrow wedge of wind, it cuts sharply over a field of barley; it is edged, and hard, and single. Another wind-wedge, with looser, vaguer edges. A mist swirls over the shoulder of Black Top, thickens, clouds the mountain.

A barberry-leaf jerks, and settles; two barberry-leaves quirk themselves upright, and fall back; from over the hill there is a quick skirling of crisp leaves — nearer. The trees begin to whisper, and the snaky road hurls its dust into the air and plunges down

hill into the blue-black wind. All the leaves are blowing now, shivering, pulling, throwing themselves frantically hither and thither; they are not green any more, but blue and purple, and they play over the rolling thunder like flutes and mandolins over double basses.

Something races along the road. Sharp whip-cracks staccato upon the double basses and flutes. Who lashes a poor brute up a hill like that? On the two-yard level, something passes in a smear of yellow wheels and bright steel shoes. Who goes there? "Boston! Boston! . . ." But the stones of the down grade are already clattering and rolling as the horse goes over them. A spatter of rain slaps the barberry-leaves; patter — patter — rain, and a grieving, tearing wind. A flare of lightning! There is no one on the road. A long peal of thunder, and then beating rain.

## II

"Lucindy-Ann, you run upstairs this minit and shut them guest-room winders, ther's a awful storm a-comin'."

Lucindy-Ann tears up the narrow stair, but pauses at the guest-room window to see the black water of the bay wrinkle and flow, and all the fishing-boats scud to their moorings. A flicker of lightning quicksilvers the window-panes. A crash of thunder sets them clapping in their frames.

"Somebody's caught," giggles Lucindy-Ann. "Well, ef that ain't a queer team!"

Along the shore road comes a high carriage with yellow wheels. It comes so fast it reels from side to side, swaying in a dreadful way. Standing up in it, lashing the white horse, is a man, in a long laced coat and cocked hat. "Did you ever see a figure

of fun to beat that?" Lucindy-Ann leans from the window, and the lightning spots her out against the black room behind like a painted saint on a dark altar. Lucindy-Ann does not falter. There is a child beside the man, clinging and shaking. The horse is making for the house.

"You come right in," shouts Lucindy-Ann. "Drive around to the kitchen door," but before she can say more, the man has pulled his sweating horse up under the window.

"Which is the way to Boston?" he calls. And his voice quavers, and quivers, and falls. A clap of thunder, the child shrieks, the old apple-tree by the window creaks. The man looks up, and his clothes are torn — worn, draggled, caked with mud. His face is white, and his eyes a-stare, the lightning strikes him out to a glare: he, and the child, and the yellow-wheeled chaise, against a background of blue-black haze. The waves slap

on the sandy shore, the apple-tree taps on the entry door. "Which way to Boston?" the cracked voice wails. "Boston — Boston . . ." the echo trails away through tossing trees. In the bay, the fishing-boats heel to the breeze.

A roll of thunder jags and cracks over the house roof. Rain-drops — clashing on a row of milk-pans set out to air.

"Boston, Sir, why you must be mad, you're twelve miles from Providence, and headed fair that way." A sharp whip cut, a snorting horse, a scrape and whir of the yellow wheels, round spins the chaise, and dashes for the gate.

"An' ef he ain't took the wrong turn agin!" gasps Lucindy-Ann, as she draws her head in. The milk-cans rattle, as the thunder bursts and tears out of the sky. Away down the road comes the clicking

clatter of fast wheels, lessening the distance to Providence.

"I don't s'pose it matters," says Lucindy-Ann, but she scuttles down the stairway as fast as she can.

III

The sky is lowering and black, a strange blue-blackness, which makes red houses pink, and green leaves purple. Over the blowing purple trees, the sky is an iron-blue, split with forks of straw-yellow. The thunder breaks out of the sky with a crash, and rumbles away in a long, hoarse drag of sound. The river is the blue of Concord grapes, with steel points and oblongs, down the bridge; up stream, it is pale and even, a solid line of unpolished zinc.

Tlop — Tlop — Tlop — Tlop! Beyond the willows, the road bends; someone is coming down it at a

tremendous speed. Indeed he is in a hurry, this someone. You can hear him lashing his horse. A flashing up of willows and road on a lightning jab. A high yellow-wheeled gig, or chair, fashion of a century ago. A man in a cocked hat, a child in a snood! What the devil gets into the blood when thunder is rumbling? Have a care, man, that horse is stumbling. Down on his knees, by Gravy! No, up again. Bear him on the rein. Hi! Do you hear? A queer swirling and sighing in the air. The crying of a desolate child. A quivering flare of lightning sparkling in the whirling spokes of turning wheels. Tlop! Tlop! on the wooden planks of the bridge. No thanks to you you're not over the edge. Lord, what a curve! He went round on one wheel. Do you hear anything? No, feel rather. Drifting over the grape-blue river, seeping through the willow-trees' quiver, is a faint, hoarse calling of "Boston — Boston —

Will no one show me the way to Boston?" Poor Devil, he can't have left it above an hour. Listen to the bridge drumming to the shower. And the water all peppered with little white rounds, it's funny how a storm plays the mischief with sounds. Sights, too, sometimes. Cocked hat, indeed! I must have been dreaming.

## IV

Guinea-gold, the State House dome, standing out against a wall of indigo cloud. Boldly thrust out in high relief, with its white façade, and its wide, terraced esplanade. It spurns the Common at its feet, treading on it as on a mat, cooling itself with the air from its fanning trees. Guinea-gold lightning glitters through the indigo-blue cloud, a loud muffled booming of thunder, then the rain, pin-pointing down on the stretched silk of umbrellas, clipping like hard white beans on glass

awnings, double-streaming over the two edges of sidewalk clocks. Electric car gongs knock sharp warnings into the slipping crowd. A policeman humps himself into his rubber coat and springs to catch the head of a careering horse.

"Stop beatin' him, ye Fool. Did n't ye see me raised hand? Whoa! Stand still, ye beast. You advertisin' fellers think the least ye do is to own the city. I've a mind to run ye in. Fool-bumpin' along like that. What you pushin' anyway, breakfast food or automobiles? He was a clever guy rigged ye out, but I guess ye're about due for a new set of glad rags, judgin' by them ye got on. Here, Kiddie, don't cry, ye'll soon be home now, snug and dry. Listen to that thunder. Some storm! No wonder ye're scared; it's fierce. What's that? Mrs. Peter Rugg? Middle Street? See here, I ain't a direct'ry, ye'd better inquire at

the post-office. Tell your breakfast food to put its name on ye next time."

There is a hissing of sparks as the steel shoes strike the wet asphalt. A clattering of iron tires on the metal roadway, drowned by a thunder peal. Wires and wires of linked rain, hatching over the disappearing yellow wheels.

The policeman rubs a wet, red ear. "That's a queer thing," he mutters, "very queer. I thought he asked me the way to Boston, just as he was drivin' off."

V

The yellow-wheeled chaise with the cocked-hatted man takes all of New England into its span. Logging-men, drifting down the Kennebec on floating rafts, see a moving speck of sulphur dust along the bank, an old-fashioned gig, drawn by

a lank white horse, driving furiously before the storm. A moment later, a thunder-bolt gashes across the sky, they can feel the raft jolt. Then the river swirls into lumpy waves and the logging men jump to their poles and staves.

An automobile, struggling up Jacob's Ladder on the way to Lenox in the teeth of a thunder-shower, sees glowering ahead on the down stretch, a wretched one-horse rig, which, in the uncertain light, seems as big as a locomotive. The driver switches on his klaxon and takes the down slope. But he might be a loping broncho, for all the gain he makes on the one-horse team. His klaxon screeches and echoes among the hills. Is it a dream that over its din, a thin voice reaches his ear? "Boston — Boston . . ." he seems to hear. "I left Menotomy a long time ago. Oh, when shall I get to Boston!"

Gloucester fishermen, moored to a wharf, hear a wheezy, coughing voice calling, pleading, in the middle of the night. It is a crazy wight, in a two-wheeled buggy of a pattern long gone by, driving a great white horse with a savage eye. The horse stamps on the thin boards of the wharf and champs his bit. There's a slip of a girl, too, who does nothing but cry. Rigging slaps and spars creak, for a gale is rising and the stars are hidden. The fishermen hear again the wail, "Tell me how to get to Boston." "Well, not that way, Idiot, you're going straight into the Atlantic Ocean." There is a terrible commotion on the wharf, the horse almost beats it through with his hoofs. Then, in the white gleam of a lightning spear, the chaise is seen rocking, shaking, making for the road above and turning toward Ipswich.

Through narrow wood-tracks where hermit-thrushes pair, staggers the yellow one-horse chair, just ahead of a lightning flare. Along elm-shaded streets of little towns, the high wheels roll, and leaves blow down on the man's cocked hat and the little girl's snood, and a moment later comes a flood of bright, white rain, and thunder so loud it stops the blood.

From Kittery Point down to Cape Cod, trundle the high, turning wheels; they rattle at the Canadian line; they shine in the last saffron glitter of an extinguishing sun by the ferry over Lake Champlain; they are seen again as the moon dips into an inky cloud passing the Stadium in East Cambridge, the driver bowed over the dasher and plying his whip; they flash beside graveyards, and thunder lashes the graveyard trees. Always the

chaise flees before the approaching storm. And always, down the breeze, blowing backwards through the bending trees, comes the despairing wail — "Boston! — For the love of God, put me on the road to Boston!" Then the gale grows louder, lightning spurts and dazzles, and steel-white rain falls heavily out of the sky. A great clap of thunder, and purple-black darkness blinding the earth.

## FOUR SIDES TO A HOUSE

PETER, Peter, along the ground,
Is it wind I hear, or your shoes' sound?
Peter, Peter, across the air,
Do dead leaves fall, or is it your hair?
Peter, Peter, North and South,
They have stopped your mouth
With water, Peter.

The long road runs, and the long road runs,
  Who comes over the long road, Peter?
Who knocks at the door in the cold twilight,
And begs a heap of straw for the night,
And a bit of a sup, and a bit of a bite —
  Do you know the face, Peter?

He lays him down on the floor and sleeps.
  Must you wind the clock, Peter?
It will strike and strike the dark night through.
He will sleep past one, he will sleep past two,
But when it strikes three what will he do?
  He will rise and kill you, Peter.

He will open the door to one without.
  Do you hear that voice, Peter?
Two men prying and poking about,
Is it here, is it there, is it in, is it out?
Cover his staring eyes with a clout.
  But you're dead, dead, Peter.

They have ripped up the boards, they have pried
      up the stones,
  They have found your gold, dead Peter.
Ripe, red coins to itch a thief's hand,

But you drip ripe red on the floor's white sand,
You burn their eyes like a firebrand.
  They must quench you, Peter.

It is dark in the North, it is dark in the South.
  The wind blows your white hair, Peter.
One at your feet and one at your head.
A soft bed, a smooth bed,
Scarcely a splash, you sink like lead.
  Sweet water in your well, Peter.

Along the road and along the road,
  The next house, Peter.
Four-square to the bright and the shade of the moon.
The North winds shuffle, the South winds croon,
Water with white hair over-strewn.
  The door, the door, Peter!
Water seeps under the door.

They have risen up in the morning grey.
  What will they give to Peter?
The sorrel horse with the tail of gold,
Fastest pacer ever was foaled.
Shoot him, skin him, blanch his bones,
Nail up his skull with a silver nail
Over the door, it will not fail.
No ghostly thing can ever prevail
  Against a horse's skull, Peter.

Over the lilacs, gazing down,
  Is a window, Peter.
The North winds call, and the South winds cry.
Silver white hair in a bitter blowing,
Eel-green water washing by,
A red mouth floating and flowing.
  Do you come, Peter?

They rose as the last star sank and set.
  One more for Peter.
They slew the black mare at the flush of the sun,
And nailed her skull to the window-stone.
In the light of the moon how white it shone —
  And your breathing mouth, Peter!

Around the house, and around the house,
With a wind that is North, and a wind that is South,
  Peter, Peter.
Mud and ooze and a dead man's wrist
Wrenching the shutters apart, like mist
The mud and the ooze and the dead man twist.
  They are praying, Peter.

Three in stable a week ago.
  This is the last, Peter.

"My strawberry roan in the morning clear,
Lady heart and attentive ear,
Foot like a kitten, nose like a deer,
But the fear! The fear!"
  Three skulls, Peter.

The sun goes down, and the night draws in.
  Toward the hills, Peter.
What lies so stiff on the hill-room floor,
When the gusty wind claps to the door?
They have paid three horses and two men more.
  Gather your gold, Peter.

Softly, softly, along the ground
Lest your shoes sound.
Gently, gently, across the air
Lest it stream, your hair,
North and South

For your aching mouth.

But the moon is old, Peter,

And death is long, and the well is deep.

Can you sleep, sleep, Peter?

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